سیرۃ عائشہ

HADHRAT AYESHA SIDDIQA

HER LIFE AND WORKS

By

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The "Life of Ayesha Siddiqa" is an extremely important and useful book which was written in Urdu by Maulana Saiyid Sulaiman Nadvi, a famous Islamic Scholar, writer and a man who loved Islam above all else.

In fact this is a book which must be read by every Muslim woman because it depicts the lifestyle of one of the Prophet Muhammad's (peace and blessing of Allah be upon him) most beloved wives, a model after which any Muslim woman can fashion her own behaviour and conduct. In view of the significance of this work, we arranged for its English translation so that all Muslim women whose mother tongue is English may benefit from it.

We are grateful to Madam Maryam Jameelah for editing the English translation and making valuable comments. We are also thankful to Syed Athar Husain who not only took great pains in translating the book but also obtained the permission from Daira-tul-Musanafeen Azam Garh India for the publication of the translation.

We pray to Allah Almighty to benefit our readers by this book and enable us to present more books for the propagation of Islamic teachings.

PREFACE

Many books written in Urdu, during the renaissance of this language have brought to light the achievements of the great men of Islam but the contribution made by eminent muslim ladies have yet to see the light of the day. The life history of Hadhrat Ayesha is the first attempt to focus attention on their achievements.

While men are primarily responsible for the decadence that has set in the history of Islam, part of the responsibility also lies on the shoulders of women. If superstitions, undue veneration of tombs, pagan customs, extravagance on the occasions of marriages and deaths and the like are still prevalent in our homes, it is largely due to the withering of the real spirit of Islam in the hearts of our women. One reason for this may be that the portrait of an ideal Muslim woman is as yet unknown to them.

We are now presenting before them a portrait of the favourite life partner of the Great Prophet (peace be upon him) for nine years and who served the cause of Islam as a beacon light for more than forty years thereafter.

In this biography of Hadhrat Ayesha, a Muslim woman will find all the vicissitudes of life relating to adversity and affliction, marriage: departure to and stay with husband, co-wives, childlessness, widowhood, poverty, house-hold chores, rivalry and jealously to act as an ideal pattern of living for her own conduct. At the same time one will find this great life filled with the highest literary, practical, and ethical values. It will serve as a mirror to reflect to all Muslim women the true picture of a true story. This life sketch is not only worth study because it portrays the totality of the events in the life of a wife of the Holy Prophet but also because it sheds much light on half the life of the greatest man.

Biographies are generally based on historical records and chronicles. But the record of the period to which the biography relates is mostly preserved in the books of Traditions. That record pertains mostly to the practical life of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him), his wives and the leading Companions. Our source material is, therefore, confined to these books. At places material has been collected from such history books as **Tabaqat ibn Sa'd, Tazkira Zahbi, Tahzeeb ibn Hajar, Fatuhul Bari, Qustalani, An-Nawawi** and others. The well-known historical works have not been touched. Details of the Battle of Camel are not mentioned in the books of Traditions. They are to be found in Tabari.

So far as the books of Traditions are concerned, I have relied mostly on **Sahih Bukhari, Sahih Muslim, Sunnan Abu Daud** and **Musnad of Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal**. The sayings of Hadhrat Ayesha are found in detail in the sixth volume of the Musnad. There are, in addition, two rare books- **Mustadrak** by Hakim and short treatise by **Seoti** entitled **'Ainul Isaba'** in which are collected those Hadith in which Hadhrat Ayesha has corrected the mistakes of her contemporaries.

Those who have studied the Traditions know that in these books, particularly **Sahih Bukhari**, the events and descriptions are so widely dispersed that it is no easy task to collect and compile them in a single work. It should be remembered that the same Hadith finds mention in many books of Traditions or in different chapters of the same book and if references have been given from one book, it does not mean that they are not mentioned in other books or in other chapters. Sometimes references from different books have been given for the same event.

In the end I wish to gratefully acknowledge the help and inspiration given by Her Highness of Bhopal, whom I had the pleasure to meet on November 29, 1914 at Bhopal, during the completion and publication of this book.

SAIYID SULAIMAN NADVI

Geneology

Hadhrat Ayesha (may Allah be pleased with her) who carried the title of Siddiqa, the surname of Humaira, and the patronymic appellation (kunniyat) of Umm Abdullah, was addressed as the Mother of Believers. She had no children and her Kunniyat was based on the name of her sister Asma's son Abdullah. She had adopted this Kunniyat because the Arabs considered it a mark of nobility. Her father was Abdullah who Kunniyat was **Abu Bakr** and whose title was **Siddiq**. Her mother was Umm Rooman. She was the grand daughter of Abi Qahafa Uthman son of A'amir ibn Umar son of K'ab bin S'ad bin Taim bin Murrah son of K'ab bin Lu'ayy bin Fihr bin Malik. Her mother's geneology was Umm Rooman daughter of A'amir bin Awamir, bin Abd Shams, bin Attab bin Uzaniya, bin Sabiee, bin Wahman, bin Haaris, bin Ghanam bin Kinana. Thus, through her father she was Quraish Taymia and through her mother, a Quraish Kinanya. Through her father, her geneology meets that of the Prophet in the seventh or the eight generation and through her mother in the eleventh or twelfth generation.

Her mother was first married to Abdullah bin Harith Al-Assadi and after his death she was married to Hadhrat Abu Bakr and had two children through him namely Abdul Rahman and Ayesha.

There is difference of opinion among the chroniclers about the year of birth of Hadhrat Ayesha. Most probably she was born in the fifth year of prophethood. Hadhrat Abu Bakr's house had received the first light of Islam and Hadhrat Ayesha was fortunate enough to have never had any

acquaintance with paganism. She herself states that ever since she could recognise her parents, she knew them to be Muslims.[1]

Childhood

Extraordinary people reveal their greatness from their earliest years. They soon display their talents and intelligence which they are destined to reach in later life. Ayesha was no exception. Her manners were sublime. But children are fond of toys and games. And so was Ayesha. She would collect girls of her age in the neighbourhood and play with them. Even at that early age she revered the Holy Prophet and if he ever chanced to pass by their merriments, they would hide their toys and conceal themselves. The Holy Prophet would ask them to resume their play. She was particularly fond of toys and swings. One of her toys was a horse having two wings. The Prophet asked her what it was. She replied it was a horse. The Prophet said that horses do not have wings. But she explained that Sulaiman's (Solomon's) horses had wings which elicited a smile from the Holy Prophet. This reply is an indication of her quick wittedness, acquaintance with religious lores and sharpness of intellect.

Generally children under the age of seven or eight are careless and heedless but Ayesha remembered every significant matter of her childhood, could explain their meaning and purpose and if any verse of the Holy Qur'an was recited in her presence, she used to memorise it. She states that, once while she was playing, the verse "Nay, but the Hour is already fixed, and that hour will be grievous and painful"[2] was revealed. At the time of emmigration to Medina she was only eight years old but in spite of her tender age no Companion had a better recollection of the most minute details of that event.

1. Bukhari: Vol. 1, Page 551.
2. Q. 54:46

Marriage

The Prophet's first wife was Khadija, daughter of Khuwaylid who lived with him for twenty-five years until her death at the age of sixty-five. She died during Ramadhan, three years before the Hijra. At that time the Holy Prophet was fifty years of age. She was the second person to adopt Islam and had always given unstinted support to her august husband in his trials and difficulties. She had sympathised with him and comforted him during every adversity and had never failed to extend her helping hand to him. After the death of such a loving companion, the Prophet's life had become very sad.[1] His faithful followers were worried about him, Khola, wife of Uthman bin Maz'un, a Companion of the Prophet, approached him and advised him to contract another marriage. He asked her with whom he should be married. Khola said that both widows and maidens were available and mentioned Sauda, daughter of Zamaa among widows and Ayesha, daughter of Abu Bakr, among the maidens. The Prophet authorised her to carry out the necessary negotiations. Khola first approached Abu Bakr who gave his consent for the marriage. Ayesha had, however, already been betrothed to Jabir son of Mat'am. Before conveying his consent to the Prophet, Abu Bakr first approached Mat'am who had not yet accepted Islam. His wife said that if Ayesha would become a member of their family, her son would forsake their religion which was not acceptable to them. The engagement was broken.

Before his marriage with Ayesha, the Prophet had a dream in which an angel had presented something to him wrapped up in silk. The Prophet had enquired from the angel what it was and he had said it was his wife. When he removed the silken cover he saw that it was Ayesha .[2]

At the time of marriage Ayesha was only nine years of age but she was already fully developed in both mind and

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1. Bukhari: Sahih-Chapter Inspiration.
2. Hakim: Mustadarak.

body. Ayesha herself states that her dower was of the value of 500 Dirhams which is equivalent of less than a hundred Dollars.

After the marriage ceremony, Ayesha stayed with her parents for three years of which two years and three months were spent in Makkah and nine months in Medina after the emmigration. She might have accompanied her father when he was migrating to Abysinnia but was dissuaded by Ibn-Al-Dughunna from doing so.

The persecution of the Muslims at the hands of pagan Makkans had led to their emmigration to Medina. According to Ayesha, when the Prophet decided to migrate, he used to visit Abu Bakr daily, either in the morning or in the evening. One day when he visited Abu Bakr at noontime, he found his face covered by a sheet. The Prophet told him that he had decided to migrate to Medina. Abu Bakr's daughters, Ayesha and Asma collected the necessary provisions for the journey. Leaving their families in Makkah, the two blessed fugitives took the road to Medina, and dodging their enemies, who were in hot pursuit, they reached Medina on the twelfth of Rabi-ul-Awwal in the fourteenth year of the prophethood.

After spending some time in Medina, the Prophet despatched Zayd bin Haritha and his servant Abu Rafay to bring his family from Makkah. Abu Bakr, likewise, sent a person along with them. Abdullah son of Abu Bakr escorted his mother and two sisters in their journey to Medina. It so happened that the camel carrying Ayesha started running so fast that there was danger that the litter might topple down. Ayesha's mother started crying. After having raced for miles, the camel slowed down. When the small caravan reached Medina, the Prophet was having his mosque and some surrounding houses constructed. The Prophet's two daughters, Fatima and Umm Kulthum, and his wife Sauda, daughter of Zama'a, took refuge in one of the houses. Ayesha stayed with her mother in the locality occupied by Banu Harith bin Khazraj.

The climate of Medina did not suit the emmigrants and many of them fell ill. Abu Bakr fell ill with fever and was

nursed by his daughter. Whenever she enquired about his health, her father would recited the verse:

> "Every family is being dispossessed And death is nearer to man than his shoelaces."

Ayesha told the Holy Prophet about his father's condition who prayed for his recovery. As soon as the father recovered, the daughter fell ill. It was so severe that the hair of her head fell out. When she had completely recovered, Abu Bakr approached the Prophet and suggested that he might call his wife to his home. The Prophet said he had no money to pay for the dower. Abu Bakr offered to give him a loan which the Prophet accepted and sent to Ayesha.[1]

The ladies of the Ansar came to Abu Bakr's house. Umm Rooman bathed and dressed her daughter and then brought her before the ladies who said, 'Your coming has been a blessing and is auspicious" after which they adorned the bride. Shortly after the Prophet came, there was nothing to offer him except a bowl of milk. The Prophet took a sip and passed on the bowl to Ayesha who was too shy to drink it. The ladies advised her not to refuse the gift of the Prophet. Accordingly she took a sip and put down the bowl. The Prophet asked her to pass it on to her friends but they said that they did not feel thirsty. The Prophet said "Do not utter falsehood for every lie is recorded."[2]

The departure of the bride from her parent's house took place in Shawwal 1 A.H. It was a simple ceremony bereft of ostentation or extravagance of any kind.

This marriage changed a number of harmful customs. First, the Arabs did not give the hands of their daughters to those whom they called their brothers (though they were not actual brothers). This was the objection raised by Abu Bakr but the Prophet had said that a brother in faith is not an actual blood brother to be placed in the prohibited category. Secondly, the Arabs considered the month of Shawwal as inauspicious for the departure of a bride. The marriage

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1. Ibn S'ad: Tabaqat p. 43.
2. Ahmad bin Hanbal: Musnad.

ceremony of Ayesha took place during this month. It was also an Arab custom to take flaming torches before the party and the husband used to first meet his bride in a palanquin. All these pagan customs were abolished in this marriage.[1]

Education and Upbringing

Literacy among the Arabs, among men not to mention women was rare. At the time of the advent of Islam only seventeen people were literate in the whole clan of the Quraish. Among them there was only one woman – Shafaa, daughter of Abdullah Adwiya. It is significant that Islam ushered in an era of education and literacy alongwith the propagation of Faith. The terms of the ransom of those prisoners of the battle of Badr who were poor was that each should teach ten Muslim children. One hundred Companions of Safa were taught to read and write. Among the wives of the Holy Prophet, Hafsa and Umm Salama were literate, Hafsa having learnt from Shafaa bint Abdullah under the direction of the Prophet. A large number of men had come into personal contact with the Prophet and the latter's august company had inspired them to un-precedented heights of spirituality. Such opportunities were not previously available to women. His wives came into close personal contact with him and derived the benefit of learning which gradually spread far and wide. This large number had served as many radiating centres. Except for Ayesha, all the other wives of the Holy Prophet were widows. Ayesha alone enjoyed the advantage of being brought up under the benevolent and inspiring care of the Holy Prophet. During this period of training and upbringing, God's design took her far away from what could be only a pagan surrounding and brought her to the Prophet's abode to flourish and acquire radiance like a well cut jem for light and guidance to the Muslim women.

Among the Quraish, Abu Bakr was an expert in geneology and poetry. Ayesha had acquired these arts as her family inheritance but her real upbringing began after her

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1. Bukhari: Sahih, Chapter – Marriage.

marriage. She started learning to read and write and soon was able to read the Qur'an. Reading and writing are, however, only external manifestations of education. The standard of real learning and education is much higher. It encompasses within its ambit development of human values, perfection of conduct, knowledge of essentials of religion, the sacred law, the commands and injunctions of the Prophet and the knowledge of the Word of God. Ayesha was initiated in all these and acquired a high degree of proficiency. Apart from religious learning, she acquired knowledge of history and literature as well as some medicine. She learnt history and literature from her father and medicine from the numerous physicians of Arabia who visited the Holy Prophet. From them she had become acquainted with the descriptions of various diseases and their remedies.

The Prophet used to deliver his sermons daily near the apartment of Ayesha where she became an avid listner. Whenever she was unable to understand anything, she used to consult the Prophet after his lectures. She used to give weekly lectures to ladies who would assemble at her house for the purpose. Day and night she used to hear the precepts of religion from the Holy Prophet and then pose problems before the Prophet for solution not content till the matter became clear to her. Once the Prophet had said, "Whosoever was subjected to accounting in the Hereafter, chastisement was his lot." Ayesha said that God states "And he in whose right hand is given his record, shall have an easy reckoning."[1] The Prophet explained that this relates to presentation of accounts but if anybody was subjected to cross examination and searching questions, he was doomed. Once she asked the Prophet that 'God states, "Think of the Day when the Earth shall be given a different form and the Heavens also, when men shall appear before God, the One, the Overpowering"[2] but in another verse He says, "On the day of Resurrection, the whole earth shall appear but a handful for Him and the entire heavens shall seem lying folded together

1. Q. 84:10, 11
2. Q. 14:48

in His right Hand."[1] Where would mankind be in the absense of earth or heavens?' The Prophet replied, "On the road (in between)."

During the course of a lecture the Prophet had said "On the Day of Resurrection, people will arise naked from their graves. Ayesha asked, 'O Prophet! If men and women will be raised together, will their glance not waver in that case?' The Prophet replied, "It will be so terrible that no will have thought about another." Ayesha then enquired, "Will anyone remember others on that Day?" The Holy Prophet answered, "not on three occasions – when people's actions will be weighed, when their scroll will be handed over to them and when Hell will roar that it is reserved for three types of men." She wanted to ask if the righteous deeds of infidels and polytheists will be recompensed. Abdullah bin Jad'aan was a kind hearted and well-behaved polyteist of Makkah who had called a congregation of Quraish to put down lawlessness and bloodshed. The Holy Prophet had participated in that meeting, Ayesha enquired 'O Prophet! during the Days of Ignorance, Abdullah bin Jad'aan used to treat the people well and feed the poor. Will his generosity merit any reward?' The Prophet replied, "No Ayesha, he has never begged God to forgive his sins and shortcomings on the Day of Judgement."[2]

Jihad is an obligatory duty for all Muslims. Ayesha was of the view that as in all obligatory duties, no distinction has been made between men and women, Jihad should also be incumbent upon women. When she enquired about this from the Holy Prophet, he replied, "For women Hajj is enough of Jihad."

For marriage the consent of the girl is also necessary but maidens are too modest to speak it. Ayesha asked the Prophet, "shall the consent of the bride be asked before marriage?" When the Prophet answered in the affirmative she said, "but the brides, due to their shyness, keep quiet when the question is asked." The Prophet said, "Their silence is to be reckoned as their consent."

1. Q. 39:67
2. Musnad: Ayesha.

In Islam, neighbours have great rights upon one another but supposing one has two close neighbours, then who shall be given preference? Ayesha posed this question before the Holy Prophet who answered, "The one whose door is nearer."[1]

Once a foster uncle of Ayesha came to meet her but Ayesha did not meet him saying, "if I have been suckled by a woman, what have I to do with the brother of her husband." When the Prophet came she enquired about it from him who said, "He is your uncle so call him in."[2]

There is a verse of the Qur'an, "And who give (to others) what they give, sincerely believing that they who hasten after good........."[3] Ayesha had doubts if it would cover thieves, drunkards and evildoers who do not fear God. The Prophet stated that it only covers the cases of those who observe prayers and keep fasts and yet fear God.[4]

The Prophet had said, "whoso likes to meet his Lord, God also likes to meet him and whoso dislikes it, God also dislikes to meet him." Ayesha said, "None of us likes to meet death." The Prophet said that this was not the meaning of the verse. "It means that when a believer hears of the mercy and good pleasure of God and Paradise, his heart yearns to meet Him, God is also eager to meet him. And when an infidel hears about God's chastisement and displeasure, he abhors meeting Him and God detests him."[5]

Scores of questions and discussions on the part of Ayesha are noted in the books of Hadith which formed an integral part of her education and training.

Once a man wanted an audience with the Prophet who permitted him to come in even though he knew he was wicked. The Prophet talked to him gently and gave him every attention. When he had gone, Ayesha enquired why such courteous treatment was given to him when it was well

1. Ahmad: Musnad p. 175.
2. Bukhari: Sahih p. 909, Chapter: Training.
3. Q. 23:60
4. Tirmizi: Ibn Maja and Musnad p. 159.
5. Tirmizi: Al-Jam'i, book of burials.

known that he was an evil man. The Prophet replied, "The worst man is he who is shunned by people due to his uncivil behaviour.[1]

On one occasion, the Prophet said, "Exercise moderation, endear yourself to prople and give them tidings that their deeds (alone) will not take them to Paradise." This seemed strange to Ayesha since she thought that sinless people will exempted. She asked, "O Prophet, will not your acts ensure admission into paradise?" The Prophet replied, "Not even me except if God encompasses me in His mercy and forgiveness."[2]

Once the Prophet wanted to sleep without having said Witr prayers. Ayesha reminded him whereupon the Prophet said, "My eyes sleep but not my heart."[3] Apparently the remark of Ayesha was indiscreet but if she had not been vigilent, the community might have remained ignorant of this reality of prophethood.

Besides these questions and discussions the Prophet used to keep an eye on what Ayesha used to do and if she ever erred, he would correct her. A few Jews had come to the Prophet. Instead of saying As Salam Alaika (Mercy on you), they said "As-Sam alaika (death on you)". The Prophet replied, (wa alaikum) 'On you also' but Ayesha, who was listening could not control herself and said, "Death and curse on you." The Prophet advised her to show gentleness for God loves gentle treatment to all.

Once when some one had stolen something belonging to Ayesha, in her rage she cursed the thief. The Prophet remarked, "By cursing do not lessen your reward and the other man's sin." Ayesha was accompanying Prophet in a journey on a camel's back. The camel became restless and Ayesha cursed it. The Prophet sent the camel back saying that an accursed thing cannot go with him.[4] This meant that no one should speak ill of even of an animal.

1. Bukhari: Sahih – Chapter: Back biting.
2. Bukhari: Sahih – Babul Qasd.
3. Ahmad: Musnad p. 517.
4. Ahmad: Musnad p. 517.

Generally people and particularly women, do not bother about small sins. The Prophet told Ayesha, "Abstain even from small sins for they must also be accounted for." During the course of a conversation, Ayesha described a woman as short. The Prophet interrupted her and said that this amounted to back biting.[1]

Safiya, another wife of the Prophet, was somewhat short – and Ayesha referred to it during the course of a conversation. The Prophet remarked, "if you are to mix up the water of an ocean with what you have said, it will acquire a sour taste." Ayesha said that she had only narrated a fact. The Prophet said that he would not say such a thing even for all the treasures of this world. A beggar had called at the Prophet's door. On Ayesha's hint, a maid servant took a small quantity of something to give to the beggar. The Prophet said, "Do not count alms before giving, or else God will also give you in restricted measure."[2] On another occasion he said, "O Ayesha, even if you have a bit of a date, do not refuse a beggar. By giving it, save yourself from the fire of Hell. A hungry stomach will welcome anything."[3]

Once the Prophet prayed, "O God, keep me needy in this world, grant me death in that state and raise me among the poor on the Day of Resurrection." Ayesha enquired the reason for such a prayer. The Prophet said, "The needy and the poor will enter paradise forty years ahead of the rich. O Ayesha! do not refuse a beggar even you have only a date to offer. Love the poor and give them a place near to you."[4] Besides these counsels relating to good behaviour, the Prophet used to teach her prayers, supplications and other spiritual matters. She listened to them avidly and observed them all scrupulously.

Household Chores

Ayesha had a small apartment like so many others around the Prophet's mosque. Her door opened in its

1. Ahmad: Musnad p. 170.
2. Abu Daud: Sunnan Chapter: Manners.
3. Ahmad: Musnad, Ayesha.
4. Tirmizi: Jam'i, Chapter: Righteousness.

courtyard. The Prophet used to enter the mosque through this door. When the Prophet stayed for days at a stretch in the mosque (during Ramadan) he would put his head inside the apartment for Ayesha to comb his hair and would extend his hand for getting anything.[1] The apartment was no longer than six to seven cubits; its walls were of mud; its roof thatched with palm leaves and covered by a blanket as a protection against rain, its door which consisted of one plank was always open. A blanket served as a curtain. Adjacent to it was a top floor where the Prophet had spent a month during his absention from his wives.

The household effects comprised of a mat, a bed and pillow, a water pitcher and a bowl. In this abode, a beacon of light and guidance, the owner had not the means to light even a lamp at night. Ayesha says that sometimes forty nights would pass without the lamp being lit. Besides the Prophet and his wives, there was a maid servant called Barira. When the Prophet had only two wives – Sauda and Ayesha – he used to live alternately with them. When the number of his wives increased, he used to stay with Ayesha for two days in a period of nine days.

Not much had to be done for running the household. Even food could not be cooked daily. Ayesha says that there were hardly any consecutive three days when the Prophet's family enjoyed full meals.[2] For months on end no fire was lit and every one had to live on only dates and water.[3] After the conquest of Khaiber, the Prophet had fixed annual allowances for each of his wives which consisted of 80 "wasaq" of dates and 20 "wasaq" of barley which, due to self-sacrifice and generosity, did not last throughout the year.

Occasionally his Companions used to send him gifts. Often it happened that the Prophet entered the apartment and asked if there was anything to eat and on receiving a negative reply, they would fast for the day. Sometimes the **Ansar** would send him milk which would serve as food for the family. One day Ayesha had ground flour with her own hands

1. Bukhari: Sahih, Chapter: Haidh.
2. Bukhari: Sahih, Chapter: The Prophet's living and Musnad p. 255.
3. Ahmad: Musnad pp. 217, 237.

and prepared some bread with it. She was awaiting the arrival of the Prophet. When the Prophet came, he engaged himself in prayers and Ayesha was overcome with sleep. A neighbour's goat came and ate up all the bread.

The supply of provisions to the family of the Prophet was entrusted to Bilal. Whenever necessary he would obtain loans.[1] Before the death of the Prophet, the whole of Arabia had come under his control and spoils from all the various provinces used to fill the coffers of the Baitul-Mal, but on the day he died, the house had not even one day's provision.

During the Caliphate of Abu Bakr, the widows of the Prophet used to get provisions from Khaiber but when Umar succeeded him, he fixed yearly alowances for them. Ayesha used to get twelve thousand Dirhams and other widows received ten thousand Dirhams each.[2] There is another version that Umar had given the option to Ayesha to take either grain or land. She had taken the land. Part of the income was spent on the poor. This system continued in the time of Uthman, Ali and Amir Muawiyah. Abdullah, son of Zubair, had become Governor of Hijaz after Amir Muawiyah. He was the maternal nephew of Ayesha and he had taken upon himself to meet the entire expenditure of his aunt but the day on which allowance was received from the Baitul-Mal, the evening would generally be passed without meals.[3]

Married Life

The views of the East and the West about women differ completely. Eastern man regarded love of a woman as a blemish against his sanctity. She existed only to provide for his pleasures. The West equates her with divinity and thus the saying "The will of a woman is the will of God." According to Europe, the truth of a religion depends upon the place it assigns to women.

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1. Abu Daud: Sunnan.
2. Hakim: Mustadarak.
3. Bukhari: Sahih, Chapter: Manaqib Quraish.

Islam does not subscribe to any of these extreme views. It neither treats woman as Divine nor considers her as the source of sinfulness. It describes husbands and wives as a perpetual source of comfort and consolation to each other:-

> "And one of His signs is that He hath created for you mates of your own kind that ye may find comfort in their company; and hath put between you love and tenderness." (Q 30:21)

It is not my purpose to dwell upon the merits or deficiencies of these views or to show the status of woman in Islam generally but only to show how the Prophet behaved towards his wives. In one of his traditions he says, "The best among you are those who treats their wives well and I am the kindest towards my wives."[1] This is borne out by the cordiality and love that existed in his relationshhip with Ayesha which was never disturbed except for a solitary incident. Sincerity and affection, tenderness and love prevailed in that relationship which is greatly enhanced if it is kept in mind what privation, hunger and poverty the family had to suffer.

Amr bin Al-'As had once enquired from the Prophet as to who was dearest to him in the world. The Prophet had said that it was Ayesha. Asked about men the Prophet had said, "It is her father." Umar had advised her daughter, Hafsa, not to be jealous of Ayesha. The Prophet used to pray, 'O God! I try to treat my wives equally in all material matters but forgive me for what is beyond my control (i.e. my love for Ayesha).'

Generally it is thought that the preference for Ayesha was due to for her great beauty and charm but this is not correct. Zainab, Juwayriyah and Safiya were also young and beautiful and much has been said about their external charm in the Books of Traditions while there is only one or two reference about the beauty of Ayesha. A clue furnished by Ayesha herself is borne out by the tradition narrated by Abu Huraira, "A woman can be selected for marriage on four grounds – her wealth, beauty, pedigree and piety. You should choose a

1. Bukhari: Sahih Vol. II, Chapter: Behaviour.

pious woman." The favourite could be one who could serve greatest the cause of religion. Ayesha had distinguished herself among all the wives in her understanding of religious precepts and spiritual problems, in interpretation and intellectual grasp of the Shariah and in assimilation and remembrance of legal commands and injunctions. The Books of Traditions record that the Prophet had said, "Among men there have been many perfect persons but among women only two Mary, daughter of Imran and Asiya, wife of Pharoah achieved perfection and Ayesha has superiority over other women as Tharid (a dish) has over other dishes." Umm Salama ranked next in moral excellence and she was also very dear to the Prophet even though she was of advanced age. His first wife, Khadija, had died at the age of sixty-five but love and regard for her had so long persisted that even Ayesha used to grow jealous. The Prophet was visibly annoyed when she made any unkindly mention about her.

Love for husband

Ayesha had such ardent love for her husband that she used to grow sad it anyone else claimed the same degree of affection. She awoke one night and not finding her husband in bed, unaided by any light, she started groping for him in the darkness and found him in prostration before the Almighty. On a similar occasion, she thought that he might have gone to another wife and started looking for him only to find him busy in prayers. She was penitent and uttered, "My parents be your sacrifice. What have I been thinking and in what a celestial state you are." On yet another occasion she woke up after midnight to discover that her husband was not there. She searched for him and not finding him anywhere, she went to the graveyard where the Prophet was busy in supplication. She quietly retraced her steps and mentioned it to the Prophet in the morning who said, "Yes I had seen something in black moving. Was it you?"

Once on a journey, both Ayesha and Hafsa had accompanied the Prophet. Every evening he would come to

the litter of Ayesha and talk with her till the caravan halted for the night. Once day Hafsa suggested to Ayesha to change their camels. When the Prophet came to Ayesha's litter he found Hafsa inside. The Prophet scolded her and went inside. Ayesha was waiting for him all the while. When the caravan halted, Ayesha put her feet on the grass and said, 'O God! I cannot say anything but send a scorpion or snake to bite me! What degree of feminine anguish is reflected by this!'

Once the Holy Prophet decided not to visit any of his wives for whole a month. Every wife, touched to the heart was morose. Against his wish they could not visit him. Ayesha was counting every day of the month. When the month was over he visited Ayesha first. Among his wives were women of different status. Some belonged to rich and well-to-do families. They found the privations and austerity too hard to bear. Then came the Qur'anic verse to the effect that who ever wanted luxury and comfort could separate and whoso wanted the honour and dignity of being the Holy Prophet's wife could remain with him. None desired separation. Every one voluntarily chose the hard life. Ayesha was the first to decide. She begged her husband not to mention it to others. This was again a reflection of feminine trait. In this period of anxiety came the verse that the Prophet could retain such of his wives as he liked and leave the others. He did not leave anyone of them. Ayesha reminded him that had the authority been given to her, she would have given the command to everyone else.

When the Prophet heard about the death of Jafar in the battle of Muta he became very sad. In Islam loud lamentations over anyone's death are not permitted. Somebody came and told the Prophet that the women of Jafar's house and locality were indulging in loud lamentations. The Prophet asked the man to advise the women to stop. He reported back that they were not listening. The Prophet asked him to throw dust over their faces. He went and returned again to say something. Ayesha was observing from behind the door. She was growing very perturbed that the man was neither carrying out the directions nor was leaving the Prophet.

The life of the Holy Prophet was an example for all mankind. In order to show how one should gain the good-will and affection of one's wife, he used to occasionally meet his wives with unusual delight and joy. Ayesha had brought up a girl of **Ansar** and when she was married, she supervised the simple ceremony. The Prophet came from outside and asked why was there no singing.[1] On an Eid day, Negroes were demonstrating their wrestling prowess with the aid of spears. Ayesha wanted to see the performance. The Prophet stood in front and Ayesha observed the scene from behind him as long as she liked.

Once she was talking very boldly with the Prophet. Abu Bakr happened to come and he grew so angry at her daughter's behaviour that he wanted to beat her but the Prophet prevented him. After Abu Bakr had left, he remarked, "see, how I save you."[2] The Prophet once brought a slave girl and asked Ayesha if she knew her. Ayesha answered in the negative. The Prophet said, 'The girl sings beautifully. Would you like to hear her.' The girl sang for her. At times the Prophet would recite a story to her. Once he told her the anecdotes of Khurafa, a man of the Azra clan who was picked up by a **Jinn** who showed him some marvellous things which he narrated to the people after his return.

The Prophet could not take all his wives with him in his journeys. Lots were drawn. She whose name came out would go with him. Ayesha had accompanied him on several of his journeys. She had accompanied him in the expedition of **Bani Al-Mustaliq** and two singular distinctions were conferred by God on her. One related to instruction for smearing hands and face with dust if water is not available for ablution and the other related to upholding the chastity of innocent women. According to the **Musnad** of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, she had also accompanied the Prophet in the journey to Hudaibiya and was among the several wives who had gone for the farewell pilgrimage.

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1. Musnad: Vol. VI, p. 269; Bukhari: Chapter: Marriages.
2. Abu Daud: Sunnan; Chapter – Manners.

The Holy Prophet was fond of riding and archery and would induce his companions to practice these. On one of these expeditions he asked all his followers to go ahead. When they were left alone, he asked Ayesha to compete with him in a race which Ayesha won. On a similar occasion, the Prophet was the winner and he remarked that he had avenged his earlier defeat.

Love is something which cannot be easily analysed. Neither its depth can be fathomed nor its expanse can be measured. Blandishment and coquetry are part of faminine traits. Conversations between the Prophet and Ayesha should not be assessed as that of a Prophet and his followers but as between husband and his wife for afterall, they were human beings.

Ayesha says that she was surprised when the verse was revealed that a wife can forego her **"Mehr"** but when the verse was revealed that the Prophet could retain such of his wives as he liked and abandon the others she said to the Prophet, "I see that God quickly fulfils your every desire."[1] This was not intended to raise any objection but was only an exhibition of loving coquetry.

The Prophet used to remember his dead wife Khadija. One day he was describing her in detail. Ayesha interrupted him by saying "why should you mention so frequently that old woman who died long ago when God has given you so many better wives?". The Prophet's facial complexion changed at this remark and he said, "Khadija was that wife who believed when other refused, she confirmed my apostleship when others were rejecting it, when people were denying assistance to me, she helped me by her wealth, God gave me children and sustenance through her while my other wives are childless."[2]

Once Ayesha had severe pain in her head. The Prophet was also suffering from a severe headache which later developed into his fatal illness. He said to Ayesha "If you were to die before me, I would have bathed you with my own

1. Bukhari: Sahih – Commentary on Abzak.
2. Ahmad: Musnad, Volume VI, pp. 118, 150.

hands, wrapped you in your shroud and buried you and prayed for you." Ayesha said, "You are wishing for my death. If that were to occur, you would bring a new bride in my place in this very apartment!" The Prophet smiled.[1]

A prisoner was brought to the Prophet and was kept in Ayesha's custody who was talking to other ladies. Then he escaped. When the Prophet came and found the prisoner missing, he said to Ayesha, 'Your hand will be cut off.' He went out and told the companions about the prisoner's escape. He was again captured. When the Prophet entered his apartment he found Ayesha looking at one hand and then the other. He asked Ayesha what she was doing. She replied that she was seeing which hand would be cut. The Prophet was very deeply moved and raised his hands in prayer for her.

One day she asked her husband, 'O Prophet! if there were two pastures – one untouched and the other browsed, which would you prefer for grazing your camels." The Prophet said that he would prefer the first. Ayesha had tactfully referred to the fact that amongst his wives, she alone was a maiden.[2]

In the incident of Ifak when God attested Ayesha's to innocence in His revelation, her mother advised her to touch the feet of her husband. She curtly replied, "I do not worship anyone except my God who has attested my innocence and shamed the slanderers."

The Prophet once said, "O Ayesha! I know when you are pleased with me as also when you are angry with me. When you are angry, you swear by the God of Abraham and when happy you swear by the God of Muhammad." Ayesha replied, 'O Prophet! the difference does not go beyond the tongue.' Margoliouth, in his "Life of Muhammad", has distorted this conversation and described it as follows: "When Ayesha was irritated by Muhammad she would refuse to accept him as a Prophet and severely criticise his revelations."

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1. Bukhari: Sahih: Chapter Illness p. 46.
   Ahmad: Musnad Volume VI, p. 228
2. Bukhari: Sahih: Chapter Marriage p. 26.

What a revealing example of the orientalist's knowledge of Arabic, their intellectual integrity and unbiased assessment and criticism!

Service

Though there was a maid servant, Ayesha used to do most of the household chores herself. She would grind the grain, knead the dough, and cook the food. She would make the bed and store water for ablution, wash the clothes and the toothstick, comb the hair of the Prophet and rub scent on his clothes.[1] She would also entertain guests.

Obedience

The greatest quality of a wife is her obedience and compliance to the wishes of her husband. During the nine years of her married life, she never disobeyed her husband and whenever she felt that something was not liked by him, she gave it up. She had put up a painted curtain on the door. When the Prophet saw it, he frowned. Ayesha wanted to know what mistake had she committed. The Prophet said that angels do not visit the house which are adorned by pictures. She immediately tore up the curtain.[2] A companion wanted to give the wedding dinner but he had not the means to do so. The Prophet sent word to Ayesha to send a basket of grain. She complied with his wishes and did not retain anything for the evening meal.[3]

During the lifetime of their husband many women are obedient but the real test arises after their death to do what they liked and to abstain from what they disliked. Even after the death of the Prophet she meticulously followed all his commands and injunctions. He had preached generosity. She retained this trait to the end of her life. He had said that for women **Hajj** is their **Jihad**. She made it a point to perform

1. Bukhari: Sahih; Ahmad: Musnad Vol. VI, p. 68. Tirmizi: Shimail.
2. Bukhari: Sahih, book: dresses, Chapter: Figures.
3. Ahmad: Musnad, Vol. VI, p. 758.

Hajj every year. Once somebody sent some cash and clothes to her. She returned them but she accepted them later saying that she had remembered some saying of the Prophet. She had kept fast on the day of Arafa in intense heat. Somebody suggested that she should break the fast. She went on sprinkling water on her head but did not break the fast saying that fast on the day of Arafa washes away one year's sins.[1] A woman asked her whether there was any harm in use of henna. She replied that Prophet liked its colour but not its smell. It is not prohibited. If you like, you can use it."

Religious Life

The apartment of Ayesha was the sanctuary of the Holy Prophet. Whenever the Prophet entered the house, he would audibly recite "If the son of Adam has two fields filled with wealth and treasure and he desires a third, only dust can fill the chasm of his greed. God says, "I have conferred wealth for My remembrance and assistance of the poor. If it returns towards God, God turns towards the man." The daily repetition of these sentences was meant to instil in the hearts of the hearers the transitory nature of the world and the insignificance of wealth.

The Prophet used to sleep after **Isha** Prayers and get up well before dawn and say **Tahajjud** prayers. He used to wake up Ayesha who would join in the prayers. When dawn would break he would say **Sunnah** prayers and again lie down and talk to Ayesha. At the morning prayers he would go to the mosque to lead it. At times both he and Ayesha would pray throughout the night. The Prophet would recite long surahs like the **'Family of al-Imran'** and **'Women'**. If he came across any verse calculated to engender fear of God, he would beseech God's protection and if he come to a verse giving glad tidings, he would pray for its conferment and his prayers would continue throughout the night.

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1. Ahmad: Musnad, Vol. VI, p. 128.

Besides the five daily prayers and **Tahajjud** prayers she would follow the Prophet in saying **"mid-morning prayer"** and in keeping fasts. In the last ten days of Ramadhan, the Prophet would seclude himself in the mosque for constant prayers **(I'tikaf)**. Ayesha used to have a tent pitched in the courtyard of the mosque for the **I'tikaf**. The Prophet would visit the tent for a short while after the morning prayers.[1]

In the eleventh year of the **Hijra** she accompanied him for **Hajj**. She intended to perform both the lesser Pilgrimage and the full Pilgrimage, but when she was prevented from circumbulating the Ka'ba due to her periods, she burst into tears. The Prophet consoled her and explained the orders. She completed the rest of the rites in the company of her brother, Abdul Rahman.

Though silk and gold ornaments are not prohibited for women, the Prophet had not only forbidden them but also gold and silver utensils, soft beddings and fine linen for his wives. Ayesha asked him whether there was any harm in a little gold for keeping Musk. He had replied, "Use silver and colour it with Safron."

Relation with co-wives

The bitterest thing for a woman is to be one of the several wives of a husband. Ayesha had to live with as many as eight of them but the company of the Prophet had ensured that their relations were never clouded. Small differences did arise among them now and then as they are bound to arise where so many people live together particularly if each is the wife of the same man. But they were always transitory and insignificant and were quickly reconciled with spirit of cordiality and mutual respect. Juwayriyah who was extremely pretty was Ayesha's potential rival but they also lived like good friends. Another wife, Zaynab, was a cousin of the Prophet and could claim greater nearness but when the incident of Ifak took place she said to the Prophet that she had found nothing but

1. Bukhari: Sahih, I'tikaf of women.

good in Ayesha. On Zaynab's death Ayesha had said, "I have never seen a woman more religious, more pious, more truthful, more generous and more ardent in seeking the good pleasure of God. She was however, a little irritable for which she used to be sorry."[1] When Maimuna died, Ayesha extolled her virutes and said that she was pious and righteous. If any difference arose, Hafsa, daughter of Umar and Safia, who was originally a Jew and had embraced Islam, would generally side with Ayesha.

Some chroniclers in their eagerness to write the smallest details of the Prophet's life, have mentioned some of the differences among the co-wives but most of them are false for these have been presented in a way that would require their presence at odd moments inside the apartments of the wives and some are clearly made out to be merely stories derrogatory to the other wives, particularly Ayesha when schisms had arisen in Islam and a new sect had been born the creation of which had political overtones. Waqdi and Kalbi are among the bold, indiscreet and unreliable chroniclers.

What greater proof can there be about the cordial relations between the wives of the Prophet then the fact that his family life was serene and undisturbed barring one occasion when he had remained aloof from his wives for a month until a Quranic verse had been revealed; he could engage himself in nightly prayers and pursue his prophetic mission with complete peace of mind. Bickerings and dissensions could not but have adversely affected that peace.

Ayesha had great affection for the Prophet's daughter, Fatima. Concerning her she said, "Besides the Prophet, I have never seen a better person."[2] A **Tabii** (persons succeeding the companions) had asked Ayesha as to who was the person dearest to the Prophet. Ayesha said, "It was Fatima. In her manners and deportment she was nearest to the Prophet. Whenever she visited the Prophet, he would rise and kiss her forehead and make her sit at his place. She would respond in the same manner, whenever the Prophet visited her.[3]

1. Muslim: Sahih.
2. Zarqani.
3. Tirmidhi: al-Jam'i

She relates that 'one day all of the wives of the Prophet were sitting with him when Fatima came. Her gait was like that of the Prophet. He welcomed her profusely and made her sit close to himself. The Prophet whispered something into her ears and she burst into tears. Seeing her distress the Prophet again whispered to her. She smiled. When the Prophet had gone I asked her to tell us what the Prophet had told her. She replied that she would not tell any secrets of her father.' After the Prophet's death I again asked her to tell me what the Prophet had told her for the sake of my rights over her. Fatima replied that now she could do it. 'I had started crying for he had told me that he was soon to leave the world and I had smiled when he had said, "Would you not like it that you will be leader of the women of paradise?"[1] This event relates to the last year of Fatima's life. It proves beyond doubt that none had any grievance against the other relating to heritage and no family dispute had clouded their hearts.

The Slander

In Makkah, the Muslims had to face open enemies. In Medina, they had to face different problems. While the Aus and Khazraj had rallied round the banner of Islam, a sizable group of hypocrites had been formed who only professed to be Muslims. the Qur'an has repeatedly referred to them. The hypocrites were alarmed at the growing power of the Muslim State and were in alliance with the Quraish. They availed themselves of every opportunity to create discord between the tribes of Aus and Khazraj, and to pit them one against the other in order to shake the foundations of Islam, when they were coalescing into one ideological fraternity under the leadership of the Prophet. After every attempt had failed, they started a furtive campaign to malign the Prophet and his family, particularly Hafsa and Ayesha, the daughters of Umar and Abu Bakr, who were the bitterest opponents of the hypocrites.

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1. Muslim, Sahih: Book: The Excellence of the Companions.

in Sha'ban 6 A.H., the Prophet received information that Al-Mustaliq were preparing for an assault on him. The Prophet led a force to meet the enemy at the spring of Bani Al-Mustaliq near Al-Murasyi where he ousted the enemy who then fled. A large number of hypocrites alongwith their leader Abdullah b. Ubayy had joined the Muslim army.

While the army was still at this place a hired servant of Bani Ghifar belonging to the **Muhajirin**, quarreled with another man of the tribe of Juhinah, an ally of Al-Khazraj. He called out, 'O ye **Muhajroon**' and the other man shouted, 'O ye Ansar'. Abdullah b. Ubayy, who was nearby, shouted to his associates, "Did they dare it? They set themselves against us in our own city and tried to outnumber us. By God, had you held back and had not been so generous, they would certainly have gone elsewhere." When the Apostle came to know about it, he gave orders to break camp and to march off allowing no time for the argument to grow more heated.

At one of the halts on the way back, the Prophet directed the army to march in the early hours of the morning. Ayesha, who had accompanied the Prophet in the expedition, had gone some distance to ease herself. The bearers of her litter, thinking that she would be inside, put it on her dromedary and the army marched off. Ayesha was delayed in her return for the chain of her necklace had broken and it had fallen down. Having noticed the loss, she had gone back in search of it. The army had, meanwhile, marched away. Stranded she lay down on the ground in the hope that her loss would soon be discovered and some one would come to her rescue.

Now Safwan b. al-Muatta al-Salami who had been left behind at day break, asked if anything had been left. He saw Ayesha and said, "By God, the Apostle's wife." He seated her on his dromedary, took hold of its halter and briskly walked to catch up with the army. By the next halt, Safwan overtook the army. Nobody noticed the incident which was not unusual for caravans trekking the vast emptiness of the Arabian wilderness.

Abdullah b. Ubayy came to know about it and wanted to make use of it for his own ends. He found a pretext to slander the Prophet and his family and to erode the sentiments of

love and admiration the Muslims had for the Prophet and his household. He started a campaign of vilification and three gullible Muslims lent ear to the slander.

When Ayesha came to know about it, she was bewildered and plunged into deep sorrow. The scandal was even more distressing to the Apostle of God. Ascending the pulpit of the mosque, he said, 'O ye believers, who would punish the man, who, I have come to know, has caused this trouble to my family? What I know of my family is naught but good and what they say concerning a man, I have known only good about him."

The people of the Aus were filled with rage at the slander. They said, "We are prepared to behead the man, who has given tongue to this calumny whether he belongs to Aus or Khazraj." Abdullah b. Ubayy belonged to Khazraj. Sa'd b. Ubadah took it as an affront on the honour of his tribe. He said to Sa'd b. Muadh, 'I would have spoken about my tribe. You cannot kill the man. You do not have that power.' A cousin of Sa'd b. Muadh said: 'What is this hypocrisy. You are siding with the hyprocrites. Feelings ran high and the dying members of the tribal feud were likely to be rekindled but the Prophet pacified both of them and the matter ended there.

When Safwan learnt that Hassan had composed a derogatory couplet he took out his sword and went in search of Hassan and attacked him saying, now receive this cut. I am not a poet but a warrior. He was caught and brought before the Prophet who had Hassan compensated.

Ayesha was confident that God would protect her honour and put to shame the slanderers but she could not imagine that God would send a revelation to attest her chastity and to safeguard the chastity of pious women of all times which would be read in mosques and prayers to the end of time. She had not to wait long when came the revelation came to prove her innocence.

> "Lo! They who have raised this slander are a gang among you. Deem not (O Prophet) that it will do you any harm. On the other hand, it will give you an advantage (over the accusers). Unto every one of them will be paid what of sin

he hath earned and for him who played the leading part, shall be correspondingly severe chastisement. Why did not the believing men and the believing women among you, when they heard of this, think well of their own people, and say: "This is a manifest slander!"

Why did they not bring forth four witnesses (in their support)? They have not brought forth any witnesses: they are surely liars in the sight of God. And were it not for the goodness of God towards you and His mercy in this world and in the Hereafter, a grievous chastisement would have befallen you for what you have spread abroad.

"For what ye uttered with your tongues or spoke with your mouth of that of which ye had no knowledge, ye deemed it to be a light matter; but in the sight of God, it was indeed very grave.

. And why did ye not when ye heard it say, "It becomes us not to talk of it. Glory be to God! This is indeed foul slander."

"God warneth you never again to indulge in such a thing, if ye be true believers."

"And God giveth you clear directions. For, God truly is the Knower, the Wise!"

"For those who love to spread foul slanders against those who believe, a grievous chastisement awaiteth them in this world and in the Hereafter. And God knoweth, while ye know not."[1]

Three of the leading culprits were given eighty lashes each. Hassan was ashamed and he composed a very fine poem to eulogize Ayesha. Bukhari relates that he recited the poem before Ayesha. One of the couplets was to the effect:-

'Virtuous, grand and of undoubted character is she, Who does not like to back bite or slander any one'.

Whenever people spoke ill of Hassan, Ayesha never said anything against him. On the contrary, she would ask people to forgive him.

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1. Q. 24:11 to 20.

Tayammum (Dry ablutions)

Ayesha accompanied the Apostle in another expedition, wearing the same necklace which again broke and fell down. She informed the Prophet and he directed the army to halt.[1] Dawn was about to break. A man was sent to search for the necklace. No water was available here and the prayer time was near. Some people complained to Abu Bakr that because of Ayesha they have been placed in that predicament. Abu Bakr remonstrated with Ayesha. Ablution is compulsory before the prescribed prayers but many an occasion arises when no water is available nearby. Then God sent down at this appropriate moment His revelation: "But if ye be sick or on a journey or ye have come from the privy or have touched a woman, and ye find not water, then seek clean earth and wipe with it your faces and your hands (to make yourself fit for prayers). Truly God is lenient, ever ready to overlook."[2] The party was overjoyed and they began praying for the Mother of believers. Aseed bin Husain said in his joy "O inmates of the household of Siddiq! this not your first blessing in Islam." Abu Bakr proudly spoke to her daughter, 'O apple of the eye of your father! I did not know that you were so auspicious. Through you, God has conferred this facility and convenience for all the Muslim.'[3]

When Ayesha's dromedary arose, the necklace was found lying underneath it.

Abstention from wives

The wives of the Prophet were divided into two groups. One included Ayesha, Hafsa, Sauda and Safia and second had Zaynab and the others.

After the Asr prayers, the Prophet used to visit each of his wife for almost equal duration. On some days, however, he overstayed with Zaynab and the others had to wait for him. On enquiry Ayesha learnt that Zaynab had received some

1. Ahmad: Musnad, Vol. VI, p. 372.
2. Q. 4:43.
3. Ahmad, Musnad, Vol. VI, p. 378.

honey and she used to offer it every day to the Apostle and that accounted for his staying longer with her. Now the Prophet was extremely fastidious about cleanliness and any bad odour was very repugnant to him. The smell of honey depends upon the type of flowers visited by the honey bees. **Maghafir** is a flower of Arabia which has a pungent smell. Ayesha, Hafsa and Sauda decided that when the Prophet came they would enquire if he had taken honey collected from **Maghafir**? When he was told about this, he developed an aversion for honey and declared that he would never take it again. Had this related to an ordinary person, it would have been of no significance and no body would have taken any notice of it. But it related to the Apostle of God whose every word and deed would pave the way for laying the foundations of abiding laws. God, in his infinite Wisdom, rebuked the Apostle:

> "Why is it thou (O Prophet) regardeth as prohibited what God hath made lawful to thee? Is this just to please thy wives, (you are aware) God is Lenient, Merciful! God hath indeed (by virtue of your expiation) freed you from your oath. God is your Master, and He knoweth, the Wise."[1]

In that period the Prophet had disclosed some secret to Hafsa and she passed it on to Ayesha. The Qur'an refers to it, "And call to mind the occasion when the Prophet had given in confidence an information to one of his wives and she had communicated it to another, and when God apprised him of this, he spoke of it to her in part and passed over the rest. When he told her of this, she asked, 'who informed thee of it?' He said, "The Knowing, the One Aware informed me". Came the verse, "It will be well if ye both (the two wives concerned) turn to God in penitence, since your hearts are constrained against the Prophet; but if you back up one another against him, then, note that God is his Patron and that Gabriel and every just man among the believers and the angels will prove to be his helpers."[2]

1. Q. 66:1, 2
2. Q. 66:3

Much senseless efforts has been made to find out what was that secret which one wife had communicated to the other invited the displeasure of God. God has not mentioned it in the Qur'anic verse and when the Prophet mentioned it to the other wife, he disclosed only a part of it. What a husband says to his wife in confidence should be regarded as a strictly private affair. Surely it could not have been any matter of State nor could it be anything serious! It must have been some family affair which he disclosed to one wife and desired that it should not be divulged to others. Why God took such an exception that he promised not only His own help but that of Gabriel, the angels and the believers to His Apostle, was not due to the gravity of the secret but the fact that the first wife had betrayed the confidence of the Prophet and divulged it against his instructions to another and the two had cooked up something in that affair. It is the fashion of the Qur'an not to mention unnecessary details for its purpose is not historiography but the lessons.of history and to serve as a guide for good conduct. To say the least, it was unbecoming to pry into that domestic secret and to make conjectures. Bukhari though related it to the affair of honey. There was no secret about it and three wives had played a childish, or if you like a feminine prank which became common knowledge. Some undependable chroniclers went to the length of guessing that it related to Mary, the Copt, whom the Prophet had forbidden for himself. Had it been so there was no point in revealing it to one wife only and asking her to keep it a secret. That should have been a matter in which all the wives would have been equally interested and it could serve some purpose if every one knew about it. The Qur'anic verse "Why is it thou regardeth as prohibited what God hath made lawful for thee to please thy wives" surely does not refer to a secret disclosed to only one wife for it necessarily requires something known to all the wives. Any reference to Mary is ruled out completely. The Quranic verse, "And call to mind the decision when the Prophet had given in confidence information to one of his wives....." relates to an altogether difference matter and their juxta-position does not argue the continuity of the first incident.

Option

The incident of seclusion had occured in 9 A.H. By that time even distant parts of Arabia had come under the sway of Islam and tributes and spoils of war were filling the State treasury. After the conquest of Khaiber, the Prophet had fixed certain percentage of the produce of Khaiber as allowances for his wives which fell short of their requirements. They were pressing for an increase in their portions for many of them were daughters of chieftains or widows of well-to-do husbands and were not used to such austerity as the Prophet had adopted. He could not, however, abandon his austerity for their sake and this was leading to some estrangement. It was then that the revelation came, "O Prophet! say to thy wives, if ye desire the life of this world and its fineries, come, I shall offer you compensation and shall allow you to leave me in a manner agreeable to you. But if ye care for God, and His Apostle and prefer paradise in the next life, then, truly has God prepared for those of you who are mindful of their duty, a great reward."[1]

The Prophet first spoke about it to Ayesha and asked her to consult her parents before giving an answer. She said what was there to be consulted about when she would definitely choose God and His Apostle. The Prophet was glad to hear the answer. As mentioned earlier, Ayesha requested the Prophet not to disclose her answer to other wives. The Prophet said, 'I have come as a teacher and not as a transgressor."[2]

Death of the Prophet

The Prophet fell ill in 11 A.H. As his condition deteriorated, he could not lead the prayers in the mosque. Abu Bakr was asked to lead the prayers. Ayesha had pointed out that his father was too tender-hearted and might burst into tears while reciting the prayers but the Prophet over-ruled her. When his.

1. Q. 33:28, 29
2. Bukhari: Sahih, Chapter: Seclusion.
   Muslim: Sahin, Chapter: Seclusion.

death approached, the Prophet remembered that he had kept some gold coins with Ayesha. On his direction they were given away in charity for the Prophet did not like to meet his Lord in the state that he possessed some worldly wealth. His death (peace be upon him) came as a terrible shock not only to his family but to the whole community. The Prophet was buried in the apartment of Ayesha. She became a widow at the age of eighteen.

Ayesha had a dream earlier that three moons had fallen in her chamber. She had mentioned the dream to her father. On the death of the Prophet Abu Bakr said that one of the moons was the Holy Prophet and he was the best of the three.[1] Later events showed that the other two moons were Abu Bakr and Umar who were buried in the same apartment by the side of the Prophet.

God had prohibited the re-marriage of the widows of the Prophet, "The Prophet is nearer to the believers than they are to themselves, and his wives are their mothers."[2] "And it is not proper for you to cause any annoyance to the Prophet of God nor to marry after him any of his wives. This will be a grievous sin in the sight of God."[3]

The wives of the Prophet had been closely associated with him for a number of years and were his confidents in a number of the finer points of his prophethood. The rest of their lives was to be devoted to the spread and implementation of the teachings and preachings of the Apostle. They were to serve as mothers of the community and to guide and train their followers in the light of his teachings. Their duties, fixed by God himself, were as follows:

- "O wives of the Prophet! If any of you be guilty of a manifest impropriety, double shall be her chastisement; and with God that is easy.

  "And whoever of you shall obey God and His Apostle, do that which is right, twice over will We give her, her

1. Imam Malik: Al-Muwatta; Burial.
2. Q. 33:6
3. Q. 33:53

reward and We have prepared for her a generous provision.

"O wives of the Prophet ye are not as other women. If you are mindful of your duty, be not too complaisant of speech lest any one with a diseased heart should be moved with desire, but speak in the customary way.

"And stay at home, and do not make a dazzling display as in bygone days of ignorance and observe prayers and pay the poor-due and follow the directions of God and His Apostle! God only desireth, O ye, of his household to protect you from filth and maintain your purity and righteouness.

"And bear in mind what is rehearsed to you in your homes of the directions of God and the purpose underlying them for, God knoweth well how to bestow the finest grace on His creations."[1] The life of Ayesha is but a practical exposition of these directives.

The Caliphate of Abu Bakr

When Abu Bakr became the first Caliph, the widows of the Prophet wanted to send Uthman as their envoy in order to settle the question of inheritance but Ayesha reminded them that the Prophet had said that he would have no inheritance and whatever he would leave should be given away in charity. They gave up the idea.[2]

The Prophet had hardly left anything behind him to be apportioned. Bukhari states that he had left nothing by way of Dinar or Dirham, cattle or animals, slaves or servants. He had, as custodian of property, a few groves reserved for various purposes. During the Caliphate of the first four Caliphs, their proceeds were spent exactly in the same manner as he himself used to do. The yearly allowances of his wives were paid

1. Q. 33:30 to 34.
2. Bukhari: Sahih, Chapter – Duty.

from the income of these groves and during his reign, Abu Bakr disbursed the allowances to the widows of the Prophet accordingly.

The Caliphate of Abu Bakr lasted for only two years, as he died in 13 A.H. Ayesha was near him at the time of his death. He had given some property to her and he asked her to distribute it to her brothers and sisters to which she readily agreed. He desired that his shroud should be the sheet he had on in addition to two others. Ayesha pointed out that they were all threadbare. Abu Bakr replied that the living are in greater need of new clothes than the dead. He was buried by the side of the Prophet.

Caliphate of Umar

The Caliphate of Umar was distinguished by excellent administration. He had fixed cash allowance for all the Muslims and, accordingly, the allowance of the widows of the Prophet were converted into cash. Qazi Abu Yusuf writes in his book **al-Khiraj** that each of them received ten thousand Dirhams annually but according to Hakim, Ayesha used to receive twelve thousand Dirhams while the others got ten thousand Dirhams each. Umar used to distribute gifts to these widows in equal measure. Once he sent a small packet of pearls to Ayesha after taking the permission of others. When it reached her she said, "Umar has done me great favours. O God, do not prolong my life for receiving more favours."[1]

When Umar approached his end, he sought Ayesha's permission to be buried by the side of the Prophet. She said that she had reserved the place for herself but she would give preference to Umar and relinquish her own right. The third moon thus fell in the same apartment.

The Caliphate of Uthman

The Caliphate of Uthman lasted for twelve years. The first six years passed in peace but the remaining six were a period

1. Hakim: Mustadarak.

of turmoil. Ayesha states that the Prophet had advised him that if he were to receive the mantle of Caliphate, he should not himself put it off.[1]

Ayesha was extremely popular among the Muslims and was treated with great reverence in Hijaz, Iraq, Syria, Egypt – everywhere in the Islamic state. During the caliphate of Abu Bakr and Umar and part of Uthman's reign even the outstanding companions used to consult her in important matters.

The first two caliphs had maintained such a high standard of equity and justice that no one could have cause for any complaint. Peace and tranquillity reigned. The leading companions could raise no objections and the younger and the more dashing element like Abdullah bin Zubair, Muhammad bin Abi Bakr, Marwan bin Hakam, Muhammad bin Abi Hudhaifa, Saeed bin al-A'as considered caliphate and emirate as something much too elevated for them. Abdullah bin Zubair was the maternal grandson of Abu Bakr and a nephew of the Prophet. Muhammad bin Abi Bakr was the younger son of Abu Bakr and a step brother of Ayesha. After the death of Abu Bakr, his mother had married Ali and he was raised by Ali. Muhammad bin Abi Bakr was brought up by Uthman. When he came of age in the caliphate of Uthman, he aspired for a high office but as Uthman did not oblige him, he grew angry and left for Egypt. Marwan and Saeed bin al-A'as belonged to the Omayyed clan and after the death of the leading companions, they were foremost amongst their sons in seeking high offices. As clanish tendencies had re-emerged, Uthman could place greater reliance on the people of his clan and Marwan and Saeed received offices. This was resented by the rest of the Quraish and because of this Muhammad bin Abi Bakr and Muhammad-bin Abi Hudhaifa took a leading part in the rebellion against Uthman. The younger element did not possess the same standard of virtue, justice, equity, sincerity, trustworthiness, piety and righteousness as the great

1. Ahmad: Musnad, Vol. VI, page 263.

Companions. The common poeple, who had witnessed the great days of the Companions were unhappy with their government.

The Arabs considered servitude as a blot on nobility, Islam had placed all the clans on an equal footing. The leading Companions had always kept this point in mind but the younger office bearers forgot and used to boast of the nobility of their tribal prestige and independence in their assemblies. This was irritating to other tribes who claimed that after the reign of the Prophet, it was their sword which had won the conquests of Syria, Egypt and Africa and they should be given equal rights and status. The new converts outside Arabia were disgruntled not only with the Omayyeds and the Quraish but with Arabs in general and they enthusiastically supported any agitation against them. Kufa stood at the meeting point of the Arabs and non-Arabs; here is where the turmoil started. Saeed bin al-A'as was the Governor of Kufa. His indiscreet references to the nobility of the Quraish were resented by the chieftains of other tribes. Discord and antipathy took root.

A Jew, by the name of Ibn Saba, had become a Muslim to promote his own game of undermining the foundations of the Islamic State from within. He started advocating that Ali was the rightful heir of the Prophet and taking advantage of the growing unrest, he spread a network of intrigue. He went to Kufa, Basra and Egypt, where the garrisons were stationed, and started winning over rebellious poeple. The bulk of the army was engaged during the period of Uthman in battles with the Roman Empire and in Africa. For the ostensible purpose of joining the forces, Muhammad bin Abi Bakr and Muhammad bin Hudhaifa mixed with the soldiers freely and instigated them. Egypt became the centre of rebellion. They started to oppose openly Abdullah bin Abi Saraha, the Governor of Egypt and became the leaders of a political party.

When the **Hajj** season began, a thousand strong contingent each from Kufa, Basra and Egypt, marched towards Hijaz for the ostensible purpose of performing the

pilgrimage and they fixed their camps near Medina. Ali and other leading companions persuaded them to go back but soon they returned on the plea that they had intercepted a letter from Marwan to the Governor of Egypt to behead the ringleaders on their return. They demanded that the Caliph should either hand over Marwan to them or should abdicate. Then they besieged his house. Uthman rejected both demands. Ayesha tried to dissuade her step brother but he was adamant. She left for Makkah to perform **Hajj**. The insurgents maintained the seige for two or three weeks and ultimately assassinated the Caliph.

The Caliphate of Ali

The obvious choice for the caliphate were Talha, Zubair, Sa'd bin Abi Waqas and Ali. Sa'd had gone into seclusion and was not interested. The people of Basra supported Talha while the people of Kufa favoured Zubair but the Egyptians and the bulk of the insurgents headed by Malik Ushtur, Ammer b. Yasir and Muhammad b. Abi Bakr favoured Ali. Those who had not aligned themselves with any party favoured Abdullah son of Umar. After three days of hectic discussions, Ali was selected as the Caliph by common consent of the people of Medina. Opposition was aroused in Hijaz; in Syria its Governor Amir Muawiyah was dreaming of independence and in Egypt Muhammad bin Abi Hudaifa declared his independence. The murder of Uthman in the precincts of the **Haram** in a prohibited month appalled every-one. Even those who were opposed to Uthman were aghast. Before the tragedy Malik Ushtur had consulted Ayesha and she had told him that he had no right to kill the Imam. Then enemies had spread the rumour that she was also involved in the conspiracy. Some people gave credence to it as Muhammad bin Abi Bakr happened to be her brother, though she had tried to dissuade him from his design. She had openly said, "By God, I had never desired that Uthman should be disgraced, If I had desired it, may God disgrace me similarly; I had never wished that he should be slain, If I had ever wished it, may God get me slain in like manner. After this no one

should delude you. The deeds of the companions of the Prophet were never ridiculed till the birth of the sect which reproached Uthman; they said what should not have been said, they recited what should not have been recited, they prayed what should not have been prayed. Their own acts and behaviour were not even a shadow of the companions."[1]

Ayesha received the news of Uthman's assassination from the insurgents on her way back from Makkah to Medina. As she proceeded, she was met by Talha and Zubair who said that they had left Medina with their belongings in a state when people were confounded and perplaxed. They could neither recognise what was right, reject what was evil nor could they protect themselves. Ayesha said that they should discuss what should be done now. She recited a couplet:

> 'Had the leaders of my people listened to me I would have taken them out of this turmoil and danger.'

She retraced her steps to Makkah and people began to flock around her. She said, 'There is no community which turns away from the Quranic injection:

> "And if two groups of the believers are at war, then ye make peace between them. And if one of the two continue to wrong the other, fight against that group which doth wrong, till they yeild to the ordinance of God; And when they yield, ye make peace between them with fairness and act equitably."'

Cry for Reform

Conflagation had broken out. These Companions, who were still living, were seeing that the garden they had nurtured with their blood, was being devastated. They wanted to set things right and raised the banner of reform. Talha, Zubair and Ayesha were the leaders of this group. Talha was one of the foremost Muslims, the victor of many battles at the time of the Prophet, and a son-in-law of the first Caliph. Zubair was a hero of Islam who had received the title

1. Bukhari: Juzul Khaliq Afa'al ul Ibad, p. 76.

of 'friend of the Prophet', a cousin of the Prophet and a son-in-law of Abu Bakr. Talha and Zubair had been members of the electoral body set up by Umar to choose his successor. Ayesha possessed much zeal, courage and determination. The invitation for reform was accepted by a large number of people, six thousand of whom belonged to Makkah and Medina alone. Two wealthy persons, Ibn Aa'mia and Ibn Manabba contributed several hundred thousand **dirhams** and a great number of camels. Ayesha wanted to proceed to Medina which had become the strong hold of insurgents and followers of Ibn Saba but in a meeting held at her place it was decided that they should proceed to Basra. As the caravan moved, it was joined by a large number of people of the Omayyed clan who were leaving Medina to find shelter in Makkah. They were not so much interested in reform as in raising hurdles for Ali. The caravan assumed the shape of an army of three thousand men.

When Ali came to know about it, he started with his army for Basra. Abu Musa Aash'ari, the governor of Kufa, advised people not ot participate with either camp for it was going to lead to internecine war. Ayesha wrote letters to the improtant men of Kufa, and Ammar bin Yasir. Imam Hasan pleaded with the people to support Ali. Uthman bin Hanif was the governor of Basra. He deputed Imran and Abul Aswad to visit Ayesha's camp to ascertain matters. Ayesha advised them to be determined in the way of God and to support justice. Imran advised the Governor not to engage with Ayesha's force. Speakers on both the sides were trying to wean people towards their points of view. In one of her speeches, Ayesha said, "People used to criticise Uthman and to speak ill of his officers. They used to come and consult me. When we made enquiries, we found Uthman innocent, a righteous person and the open mounted critics to be sinners, traitors and liars. Their tongues said something different from what was in their hearts. When their numbers increased, they forcibly and without any reason entered the house of Uthman and shed his blood and looted his property which they had not right to plunder. They desecrated a place which was inviolate.

Beware! you have to do a job which you cannot legitimately refuse and it is to capture the assassins and to comply with the Words of God."

> "Has thou noticed those who have been given but a part of the Book (The Torah)? They are summoned to the Book of God (The Qur'an) to settle their internal differences. But a part of them decline to do so and these are a heedless people."[1] She delivered a long speech the concluding part of which was, 'I have become a target of people's questioning as to why I have come out with a force. My object is not to search out or to look for turmoil to quench it. What I am saying is to support justice and truth. I pray to God to shower His blessing on His Apostle Muhammad and to appoint his successor as He appointed successors of prophets".[2]

People had listened to the speech with rapt attention and many of them opposing camp joined hers. Questions and cross questioning started and as the situation began taking an ugly turn, Ayesha withdrew with her men. Next day there was again confrontation. The commander of governor's forces Hakeem, led an assault. Ayesha's forces withdrew to another site under her direction. The next day Hakeem tried to mount another assault but he was speared to death by a person when he uttered something foul against Ayesha. Thrusts and counter thrusts ensued but a truce was reached on the settlement that an envoy should be sent to Medina to find out from the people if Talha and Zubair had pledged their fealty to Ali willingly or under duress. In the first case they will hand over Basra to them and in the latter case they would themselves leave the city.

The envoy reached Medina on Friday. After the Friday prayers he enquired from the gathering if Talha and Zubair had willingly pledged their fealty or if they were forced to do so. Every one kept quiet. Usamah bin Zayd (the adopted son of the Prophet) rose and said that they had not willingly

1. Q. 3:23
2. Ahmad bin Abi Tahir: Balaghat-un-Nisa.

pledged the fealty and that the reverse was true. Saleh bin Hanif remonstrated with him. Several companions including Abu Ayub affirmed it. Ali wrote a letter to the governor of Basra that even if Talha and Zubair were compelled to pledge fealty it was done to smother internal differences and for the unity of the community. The envoy reported the matter to the people. The opponents showed the letter of Ali. The differences could not be reconciled and engagement ensued. The Basra forces were routed and Basra was captured. The salaries of the soldiers were distributed from the Basra treasury and information was sent to Kufa, Damascus and Medina etc. The battle had taken place on the 26th Rabi-ul-Awal, 36 A.H.

The battle of the Camel

Ali had started from Medina with a force of 700 men. Seven thousand men joined him in Kufa and by the time he reached Basra, his army had swelled up to twenty thousand. Ayesha had thirty thousand men behind her. The two forces confronted each other on a plain. Nobody wanted to fight but every one was convinced that his point of view alone was correct and was not prepared to compromise. Zubair cried, "What a tragedy that Muslims who had acquired the strength of a rock are going to be smashed by colliding with one another." Some chieftains of Kufa tribes contacted their tribes living in Basra in mosques but they refused to forsake Ayesha. A Chieftain contacted Ali to settle the matter. Ali did not want to fight and he agreed. He then contacted Ayesha and spoke to her, "Is it wise to shed the blood of five thousand for punishing five hundred men." She agreed to settle the matter. Every one was happy but not the insurgents who had killed Uthman and the supporters of Ibn Saba. They thought that if a settlement was reached, they would not be safe. the Sabaites launched a night attack and started burning the tents. Ali was restraining his men but nobody was listening as every one thought that the other party had committed breach of trust. Confusion prevailed throughout the night. In the morning Qazi K'ab of Basra advised Ayesha to mount her camel and

ride to the field. Perchance people may listen to her. Ali met Talha and Zubair reminded them of a prophecy of the Prophet that they would one day fight with Ali without justification. Both of them left the field. Zubair made his way for Medina but he was way-laid in a valley by a Sabait who beheaded him while he was saying his prayers. Talha was seen by Marwan Amvi who shot him with a poisoned arrow as he thought Talha had disgraced the Omayyed clan by running away from the battle field. Thus both the generals of Ayesha's army were murdered, one for initially opposing Ali and the other for supporting him by leaving the field.

The battle grew furious. In the absence of its generals, Ayesha's army started disintegrating. Ayesha was made the target of attack. The cradle on the camel's back she was occupying had been pierced by innumerable arrows but her gallant supporters had made an inpenetrable ring round her. They were laying down their lives but were not yielding ground. Oblivious of the cost and the havoc, brother was fighting with brother. Ali's commanders decided that till Ayesha's camel was not brought down, the battle would go on. Its protectors would not allow any to approach it. They proudly reciting –

> "We, the sons of Zabba, do not flee till we see the enemies, heads falling and their blood flowing.
>
> O, our mother Ayesha, do not panic
> For your sons are valiant and courageous O, our mother, O wife of the Prophet, O wife of the blessed and truly guided husband.
> We are sons of Zabba, the protectors of this camel
>
> For us death is sweeter than honey
> We have been nurtured in the lap of death, We announce the death of Uthman bin Affan at the points of our spears.
> Return our leader, then there is no dispute."

.... Seventy soldiers had lost their lives in shielding the camel. An enemy soldier managed to reach it when he cut off one of its legs and it fell down. With its fall the battle ended.

Ali approached Ayesha to ascertain if she had been wounded. She was initially taken to the house of one of her supporters in Basra and later to Hijaz along with her brother Muhammad bin Abi Bakr and forty respectable ladies. Ali and the Muslims in general, accompanied the convoy for some distance. Ali's son, Hasan, accompanied it for many miles. At the time of her departure, Ayesha had announced that she had no ill feelings against Ali.[1]

She remained for some months in Makkah and then settled down permanently at Medina. She used to regret that the method she had adopted for bringing about reform was improper. Ibn S'ad records that she used to say 'I wish I were a tree, I wish I were a stone, I wish I had been exterminated." She used to recite the Qur'anic verse "(O wives of the Prophet) stay at home and do not appear in public........." and weep profusely.

Ayesha had no personal bitterness against Ali. Their relations had no doubt deteriorated to the extent that it led to actual warfare but each took his or her stand in support of the view he or she held to be correct. The followers of Ibn Saba and many ill wishers had concocted some stories but they do not bear the test of impartial scrutiny and have no foundation. Ammar bin Yasin and Ushtur had gone to meet Ayesha and she spoke to Ammar. 'O Ammar! don't you know that the Prophet had said that it was unlawful to shed the blood of a believer unless he has become apostate, or is guilty of murder or adultery." Her purpose in leading any army was not bloodshed. She had, no doubt, contradicted the story spread by Ibn Saba that the Prophet, at the time of his death, had appointed Ali as his representative. The Prophet had fallen ill in her apartment and had died in her lap and no one could be a better authority than her about what the Prophet had said or not said. When asked by some one she had said that amongst females, Fatima was dearest to the Prophet and among males Ali was dearest to him who was staunch in prayers and fast. She said that Ali was amongst the Ahle-Bait. When she heard of the assassination of Ali in Kufa, she said, 'O God! have

1. Tabari: History.

mercy on Ali. When anything pleased him he used to say "God and His Apostle are true." The people of Iraq made insinuations against him and exaggerated everything.'[1]

The reign of Amir Muawiyah

The Caliphate of Ali lasted for four years. Then Amir Muawiyah became the undisputed ruler of the Islamic world for twenty years. Ayesha saw eighteen years of his reign. All the while she led a secluded life. Amir Muawiyah wrote a letter to her asking for some advice. She wrote "I had heard the Prophet saying that whoso seeks the good pleasure of God without caring for the goodwill of people, God will protect him from the ill-will of the poeple but who, in seeking the goodwill of people, displeases God, God will entrust him to the people."[2] This was a succinct assessment of the life of Amir Muawiyah. Muawiyah wanted to appoint his son Yazid as his successor. Marwan, Governor of Medina, suggested the name in a public gathering. Abdul Rahman, brother of Ayesha, opposed it. Marwan wanted to arrest him but he took refuge in Ayesha's house. Marwan asked "Is this the person about whom the Qur'anic verse was revealed: 'Who said to his parents 'Fie on you'?'" Ayesha answered from behind the curtain that no verse was revealed about her except the verse which absolved her of the scandal. She was not happy with the proposed succession of Yazid.

The Burial of Imam Hasan

Imam Hasan died in 49 A.H. during the reign of Amir Muawiyah. As a last wish, he had wanted his brother Imam Husain to have him buried by the side of the Prophet but if the people, objected he would not insist. When Imam Husain wanted to bury his brother there, Marwan bin Hakam opposed it on the ground that when the insurgents did not allow Uthman to be buried there, no one will be buried at that

1. Ahmad: Musnad, Vol. VI, pp. 86, 87.
2. Tirmizi: Jamii, Chapter: Piety.

place. Banu Hashim supported Imam Husain while Marwan was supported by Banu Omayya. Another battle seemed imminent but Abu Huraira intervented and pacified the people. Imam Hasan was buried in **Jannat-ul-Baqi**. Some Shia historians have recorded that Ayesha had herself come out to oppose the burial in her apartment. This is based on an incorrect Persian translation of Tabari's history. It is not mentioned in the original Arabic text and is clearly an interpolation of the Persian version. Ibn Athir records that Ayesha had given them permission, and the governors of Muawiyah had not objected to it but it was vehemently opposed by Marwan bin Hakam. In his history of the Caliphate Ibn Abdul Bar has given the same version.

Death of Ayesha

Ayesha was not yet sixty-seven years of age when during Ramadhan 58 A.H. she fell ill. Her illness lasted for only a few days. When people came to enquire about her health, she would say she was well. Ibn Abbas spoke to her, "From eternity, your name has been Mother of believers. You were the most favourite wife of the Prophet. You are shortly going to leave us. Because of you, God revealed the verse of **Tayyamum**. Many verses of the Qur'an refer to you which are recited daily in every mosque." Ayesha replied, "Spare me of this eulogy. I wish I had been extinct."[1] At the time of her death, she wanted to be buried in the common graveyard near other wives of the Prophet. She died in the night of the seventeenth of Ramadhan 58 A.H. Her bier was accompanied by great numbers of people. The acting Governor of Medina, Abu Huraira, led the funeral prayers. Her death plunged the whole of Medina into gloom because still another light of the Prophet's family had been extinguished.

Her features and dress

Ayesha was fair complexioned with a tinge of pink. She was beautiful and charming. In her youth she was slim but in her later years she had become somewhat plump.

1. Hakim: Mastadarak; Bukhari: Sahih.

As a measure of austerity she had only one dress which she used to wash herself. She would colour it occasionally in saffron. Occasionally she would put on ornaments including a necklace of beads of Yemen and gold rings on her fingers.

Her manners and Traits

Having spent the most impressionable period of her life in the company of the Holy Prophet (upon whom be peace) who had come to lead his people, Ayesha had reached that stage of development which is the pinnacle of spirituality. She was exalted in character, extremely sober, generous, contented, pious and kind-hearted. Contentment is a virtue generally lacking in women. The Prophet had once said that he had found a larger number of women in hell that men. Asked to give reason for it, he said, "This was due to their ungratefulness to their husbands." But Ayesha was a singular exception. She had spent her married life in austerity and privation. Fineries of dress, costly ornaments, imposing residence, delicious food she had never known at her husband's place but she had never complained. Spoils and tributes filling the state coffers were only to be distributed to the needy. She did not raise a covetous eye towards any of this. After the death of the Prophet whenever she ate full meals, her tears would flow from her eyes. Asked about this, she said she remembered the days when the Prophet had never eaten a full meal.

She herself was childless but she used to bring up poor children, particularly orphans and would arrange their marriages when they came of age. Whenever ladies approached the Prophet with any request, she would put their case to him and help them.

She would implicitly obey the Prophet and work hard to please him. If his face ever showed any anxiety or sorrow, she would grow restless. She gave all attention to his friends and relatives. She once got angry with Abdullah bin Zubair and vowed never to meet him but when the relatives of the Prophet put in a word for him, she relented.[1]

1. Bukhari: Sahih.

She never spoke ill of any one. Her narrations run into thousands but there is not a word in them of ridicule of anyone. A wife is not generally well disposed towards her co-wife but she paid tributes to them all.

The name of a man was mentioned during the course of a conversation. She observed that he was not a good person. Somebody pointed out that the man had died. She immediately began to pray for him. Asked to account for this change, she said that the Prophet had stated that one should not speak ill of a dead person.

She did not like people to praise her but in spite of her modesty, she was self-respecting and high-minded. Small talk would irritate her. She got angry with her nephew Abdullah bin Zubair when he said that her hands were too open and whatever he gave her, she would give away to the poor.

Muslim records that some Egyptian visited her and she asked him about the conduct of the governor of Egypt. He said that his conduct was un-reproachable. She narrated a saying of the Prophet who had prayed, 'O God if he who is a keeper of my community transgresses against it, Thou be hard on him but one who treats it well, Thou be benevolent towards him.'

Her courage

She was also courageous and brave. She would often visit the graveyard alone at night to pray for the department souls. In the thick of engagements, she would go to battle fields carrying water in leather bags on her back to quench the thirst of the fighting and injured soldiers.[1] In the Battle of Tranches, when the Makkans had besieged Medina and an attack from the Jews of the city was feared, she would go round to inspect the plan of defence by the Muslims. She had sought permission of the Prophet to participate actively in the battles but was refused.

1. Bukhari: Sahih, Battle of Uhad.

Her Generosity

Her most outstanding trait was her generosity and munificence. Her sister Asma was equally generous. She would go to the length of borrowing to help others. She used to say that God helps in repayment of loans where repayment is intended.

If Ayesha had nothing but a date to give, she would not hesitate to give it saying that on the Day of Judgement, "Everyone who had done even an atom's weight of good shall behold it."[1] Urwa relates that once she had given away seventy thousands dirhams in charity.[2] Amir Muawiyah had sent her one hundred thousand dirhams. The day she received the money, she was fasting. She gave away every penny. Her maid servant wished she had kept something for breaking the fast. She replied, 'You could have told me then.' A lakh dirhams sent by Ibn Zubair were similarly distributed. She had even sold her house to Amir Muawiyah in order to distribute the proceeds in charity.[3]

Observance of Prayers

She was also tender hearted and the fear of God never left her heart. She used to keep herself busy in prayers. In the time of the Prophet she used to regularly say **Tahajjud** prayers alongwith him. She did not discontinue the practice after his death. If ever she did not wake up to say **Tahajjud** prayers, she would say them before the morning prayers. She was particular about **Tarawih** prayers in the month of Ramadhan. She would keep fasts quite often and performed Hajj every year.

She meticulously avoided even small prohibited things. In one of her houses rented to some persons, people used to play chess. She asked them to desist from it or leave the house.

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1. Q. 99:7.
2. Ibn S'ad: Tabaqat, p. 45.
3. Ibn S'ad: Tabaqat, The apartments.

Kindness towards slaves

She was kind towards slaves. She had as many as sixty seven slaves freed. The master of one slave girl, Buraira by name had promised to release her if she could pay a certain amount. She used to approach people to seek contributions. When Ayesha heard of it, she gave the whole money herself.[1] One day she suddenly fell ill. Some one suggested that probably witch – craft had been used. She made enquiries from a slave girl who confessed. Asked why she had done it, she boldly said that she desired Ayesha's death for her early release from bondage. She sold her off and with the proceeds of the money, she liberated another slave.[2]

Observance of Purdah

After the revelation of the Qur'anic verse relating to Purdah, she used to observe it meticulously. If she wanted some young students to come before her for their education, she would get them breast fed by any sister or niece to become their foster aunt or grand aunt. Other students were taught behind the curtain. She would not go to the Ka'ba to kiss the black stone in a crowd of men. She would put a veil during circumbulation of Ka'ba or get it cleared of men to enable women to do this homage. Ishaq Tabaii who was blind visited her. She kept the curtain in between. He asked why she was observing **Purdah** when he could not see her. She replied, "If you can't see me, I can see you." There is no **Purdah** in **Shariah** for dead persons but as a measure of extra caution she would put on a veil, after the burial of Umar, whenever she visited the Prophet's tomb.

Her Ability and Distinction

Muslim records that the Prophet had said, "I am leaving two supreme things amidst you. One is the Book of God and the other is my family." Though the Book of God is self-sufficient and presents no difficulty in understanding, yet the

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1. Bukhari and Muslim: Sahih.
2. Darqitni, Ahmad, Malik have reproduced it in their books of Traditions.

presence of such persons will be ever required who can understand and explain its hidden meaning and underlying purpose. Who could be better exponents than the members of the family of the Prophet? Among them, Ayesha occupies a high position because of the intelligence and talent bestowed by God on her, her training under the care of the Prophet and his appreciation of her qualities. Who could be better interpreter of the Book of God, exponent of the ways of the Prophet and teacher of Islamic laws? Others saw the Prophet in congregations. She saw him in assemblies as also in privacy. The Prophet had himself said, "Ayesha had superiority over other women as Tharid had over other dishes." In a dream the Prophet was shown that she would be his wife; the Qur'an was not revealed in the house of any of his wives except that of Ayesha; Gabriel had conveyed his salutations at her thresh-hold; she saw Gabriel with her eyes; the all-pervading voice of the angelic world testified to her purity and chastity; the bearer of the revelations gave glad tidings of her being the favourite wife of the Prophet in the Hereafter. Hakim records in **Mustudarak** and Ibn·S'ad in **Tabaqat** that Ayesha said, "I am not taking pride but I am mentioning it as a fact that God bestowed upon me nine things which He did not confer on any one else in the world. Angels presented my figure before the Prophet in a dream; there was no other maiden amongst the wives of the Prophet; the Qur'an was revealed even when he occupied by bed; I was his favourite; some Qur'anic verses descended in relation to me; I saw Gabriel with my own eyes and the Prophet died in my lap."

Her Excellence and Superiority

From the point of view of knowledge, Ayesha excelled not only the common women-folk and the other wives of the Prophet, the wives of the Companions but also most of the Companions with only a few exceptions.

Tirmizi records that Abu Musa Ash'ari had said "We Companions were never presented with a problem to which Ayesha did not present a statisfactory solution."

Attar bin Abi Riyah Tabaii who was a disciple of many Companions says, "Ayesha was the best theologian, the most learned and the one having soundest judgement."

Imam Zuhri, the leader of **Taba'een** says, "Ayesha was the most learned. Even the important Companions used to consult her." Abu Salma, son of Abdul Rahman bin Auf, a leading **Tabaii** says, "There was no one better conversant than Ayesha with the Traditions of the Prophet, a better theologian, or a person knowing better the chronological sequence of the descent of the Qur'an or the details of obligatory duties."[1]

Amir Muawiyah asked one of his courtiers 'who is the most learned among the people? He said, "Amir-ul-Mominin, you are the most learned," Amir Muawiyah said, "I put you to oath. Tell me correctly." The courtier replied, 'In that case it is Ayesha.'[2]

Urwa bin Zubair said, "In the matter of lawful and unlawful in knowledge, poetry and medicine, I saw no one better versed than **Ummul Mominin** Ayesha."[3]

Masrooq Tabaii said, "By God, even the most exalted Companions used to consult Ayesha to details of obligatory duties."

Though the other wives had also propagated Traditions of the Prophet, yet none touched the stature of Ayesha in this regard. Imam Zuhri says, "If the knowledge of all the men and the Mothers of the believers is gathered at one place, the knowledge of Ayesha would be greater."

Some Traditionalists have recorded that the Prophet had said, 'Learn part of your religion from this fair complexioned lady.'

Knowledge and Interpretation

In relation to interpretation of the Book of God, Traditions of the Prophet, theology, commands and injunctions,

1. Ahmad: Musnad.
2. Hakim in Mustadarak.
3. Ibid.

Ayesha's name can be mentioned along with Umar Farooq, Ali Murtaza, Abdullah bin Masood and Abdullah bin Abbas.

The Qur'an

Al-Qur'an, in the present form, had not yet been compiled during the life-time of the Prophet. Some of the Companions, including Abu Bakr, had it recorded for their own reading. Ayesha had it recorded by her literate slave Abu Yunus. Ayesha had learnt the manner of its recitation, the inner meaning of its verses, appreciation and deduction from the Prophet. For finding a solution for every point and elucidation she used to refer to the Qur'an first and then look into the Traditions. Some Companions requested her to tell them about the manners of the Prophet. She said, 'Do you not read the Qur'an? The ways of the Prophet were a reflection of the Qur'an.' They asked what was his practice in relation to prayers during the night. She asked, "Have you not read the Surah **Muzammil**?"

A few examples will illustrate how she used to interpret the Qur'an.

There is a verse of the Qur'an regarding covering of the distance between the hillocks of Safa and Marwa as one of the rites of Hajj. It reads:

"Verily, 'Safa' and 'Marwa' are among the signposts of God, whoever then performeth the Hajj or the Umra, no blame will lie on him if he goes round the two posts." Urwa said, "Auntie! This would mean that there would be no harm if the distance between the two hillocks is not traversed." Ayesha replied, "It is not the meaning. Had it been so the verse would have been differently worded. The verse has to do something with the Ansar. Before their acceptance of Islam, they used to worship the idol "Manat" installed over these hills and, therefore, after embracing Islam they hesitation in going round the hills and asked the Prophet what was his order in relation to this practise. Then the verse came "Go round the two posts, there is no harm in it." This meaning is

confirmed by the practice of the Prophet and it has become an integral part of the rites of Hajj. Surah Yusuf contains a verse;

"Till the apostles have lost all hopes and been called liars and our help reached them and save whom We would (from among their people)."

She was asked whether the word was 'kuzzabo' i.e. they were belied or 'kuzaibo' i.e. a false promise was extended to them. Ayesha replied, "God save us. The prophets could never think that God had made false promise to them. The verse is in relation to the disciples of the prophets who had believed and testified the apostleship and their people persecuted them and they saw delay in the extension of Divine assistance so much so that the prophets had lost all hopes that the disbelievers will ever believe and feared that the believers might also go back when suddenly Divine assistance came down."

The verse in Surah **An-Nisa** about permission to marry up to four wives is as follows:-

"But if ye fear that ye shall not deal fairly with the (female) orphan wards under you, then (do not marry any of them) but marry other women whom ye like up to two or three or four; and if ye fear that ye shall not act equitably, then marry one only (from free women) or from the female captives under your charge." Apparently the first and the last part of the verse are not connected. A person asked Ayesha how failure to deliver the goods to orphans and permission to marry are connected. She replied that the verse was revealed as a consequence of the practice of some people who when they became guardians of female orphans related to them, exercised pressure on their wards to marry them in order to get hold of their property. The wards have none to plead their case. God addressed men not to behave in this manner but to marry two, three or four other women and not to seek rights over female orphans by marrying them.

There is another verse in this very Surah. "They seek thy instructions concerning women. Say, 'God hath instructed you about them; and His will is rehearsed to you in the Book concerning female orphans to whom you deny their legal due and whom you also wish to marry in order to appropriate their property as well; and also concerning weak children that ye deal justly with orphans and God knoweth whatsoever good ye do." Ayesha had explained that the words 'God has instructed you about them,' have reference to the foregoing verse and this order is about those guardians who do not marry the female orphans nor do they marry them to others in the fear that the property under their charge will go out of their control.

There was a difference of opinion about this verse:- "And let him who is above want abstain (from charging anything for his stewardship) but he who is not above want, let him charge for his stewardship something reasonable."[1] Abbas had thought that this verse has been abrogated by a subsequent verse "verily, those who swallow unjustly the property of orphans, they only swallow down fire in their bellies and soon shall they be exposed to a blazing fire."[2] Ayesha did not see any contradiction between the two verses as the verse Q. 4:10 refers to people who unjustly appropriate the property of their orphan wards and verse Q. 4:64 refers to those guardians who look after the property of the orphans, and do business on their behalf. If the guardian is well-off he should not charge anything for this service but if he is poor he can charge a reasonable sum.[3]

Another verse of Surah An-Nisa (number 128) runs as follows, "But if a woman fears from her husband ill treatment or estrangement, then it shall be no fault in them if they settle things between them amicably; an amicable settlement is always better."

For removing acrimony, an amicable settlement is always good. So the need of this revelation, was the question.

1. Q. 4:6
2. Q. 4:10
3. Muslim & Bukhari: Sahih, Commentary on An-Nisa.

Ayesha explained that the reference is to that woman whose husband does not visit her. In such an event if she does not want a divorce and gives up her conjugal rights, then the amicable settlement is not wrong and is better than divorce.

Where ever there is reference in the Qur'an to a great catastrophe, the commentators of the Qur'an, generally interpret it as the Doomsday. In Surah **Al-Ahzab** there is a verse (33:10) "That was the occasion when they had assailed you from every side, and that your eyes became distracted, and your hearts seemed to come up into your throats." Ayesha had explained that this verse has reference to the **Battle of Trench** when the enemy forces had besieged the Muslims.

In one of the verses relating to prescribed prayers the Qur'an says, "Strictly observe the prayers, especially the middle prayers, and stand up reverently before God." (Q. 2:238). The question was, what is meant by 'middle prayers'? The companions held different views. Zaid bin Thabit and Usama thought that it refers to noon prayers, some thought it meant the morning prayers (the start of a day in Arabia is reckoned from the evening). Ayesha was of the firm view and got it recorded in her copy of the Qur'an that it means the afternoon (Asr) prayers. Ali, Abdullah bin Masood and Samura bin Zundab held the same view.

In Surah Cow (verse 284) God has said, "And whether ye disclose that which is in your minds or conceal it, God will call you to account for it, and thereafter He will forgive whom He please and whom He please will He chastise."

This verse can lead one to think that even doubts, misgivings and thoughts arising in the mind will have to be accounted for, but some of them arise involuntarily and if they will be reckoned, it will be a very difficult proposition for men. Ali and Abbas were of the view that this verse has been abrogated by a subsequent verse No. 286 "God doth not lay a responsibility on any one beyond his capacity (to bear). He will enjoy the good that he hath acquired and shall bear burden of the evil he hath laboured for." Abdullah bin Umar was of the same view. Someone enquired from Ayesha the meaning of this verse and cited at the same time a verse of

An-Nisa (number 123) "He who doth evil shall reap the consequence thereof." The questioner asked: if that is the position, where does God's forgiveness and benevolence lie? Ayesha said that she had requested the Prophet to explain the meaning of this verse and he had said, "you are the first person to ask. What God says is true but He remits the small sins of man in view of small difficulties and anxieties a man suffers. When a believer falls ill or faces some adversity so much so even if he forgets where he has kept something and gets worried in its search, it attracts God's benevolence and forgiveness. Then a believer emerges from his afflictions as fire removes impurities from gold."

Hadith or Traditions

The subject of Hadith is, in fact, an exposition of the life of the Prophet. The narration of Hadith required nearness to the Prophet. Barring four or five Companions, the number of Hadith narrated by Ayesha is larger than the number narrated by anyone else. The leading Companions like Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali hold a higher position than her in deriving benefit from the company of the Prophet, excellence of speech and their intellectual capacity and understanding but they were all busy persons preoccupied with important matters of State and most of the Companions were themselves aware of the precepts and practices of the Prophet and did not need to ask any one about them. The work of collection of Hadith was started by the **Tabaeens** who were born twenty five to thirty years later after the leading Companions had died. The narration of Hadith was done mostly by the younger Companions. There are seven of them who narrated more than a thousand Traditions. Their names and the number of Hadith reported by them are mentioned below:-

1. Abu Huraira	5364
2. Ibn Abbas	1660
3. Ibn Umar	2630
4. Jabir	1540

5. Anas	2286
6. Ayesha	2210
7. Abu Saeed Khudri	1170

Some of them had lived after Ayesha. They could mix with the people freely and had visited all the important centres of the Islamic world unlike Ayesha who was a **Purdah** observing lady. If this is kept in mind, her contribution is the most outstanding and remarkable. Mere number is not, however, the only criterion. The real test is capacity to understand and explain difficult and intricate points. Five of the above narrators are only narrators and not theologians. Only Abdullah bin Abbas could match Ayesha in the number of narrations side by side with knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence, power of interpretation, thinking and capacity of deduction. Her distinction is that besides narrating the commands, injunctions and the events, she also described the causes, reasons and the prudence lying behind them.

Bukhari records a Hadith narrated by Abdullah bin Umar, Abu Saeed Khudri and Ayesha about bathing on Friday. Ibn Umar says, 'I heard the Prophet saying: "who comes for Friday (prayers) should come after a bath".' Abu Saeed Khudri says, 'The Prophet said that it is obligatory on every adult to bathe on Friday'.

Ayesha says 'People used to come from their houses and even from outside Medina and they were covered with dust and soaked in perspiration. One day such a person came while the Prophet was sitting near me. The Prophet said that it would be better if you bathe on this day.'

Once the Holy Prophet had said that people should consume the meat of sacrificed animals within three days of the sacrifice. Abdullah bin Umar and Abu Saeed treated it as a binding order but Ayesha considered it as a supererogatory order. She has narrated this Hadith as "We used to preserve the meat of sacrified animals with salt and produce it before him in Medina. The Prophet observed, 'Don't take it after three days'. It was not a definite order but he wished the

people should feed others also." She gave the reason in another narration. "There were few in those days who could afford to sacrifice animals (on the sacrifical day). Therefore, the Prophet wished that those who could not do the sacrifice should also be fed."

The books of Hadith record that the Prophet used to send someone every year to see the produce of Khaiber and to assess its worth. Ayesha in narrating this Hadith further says that he used to have the crop assessed in order to determine the Zakat before eating the fruits and distributing them. If anybody approached her to enquire about any Hadith and she was not herself the narrator of it, she would refer the man to the actual narrator. For instance, somebody asked her about drawing the hand over socks (in connection with ablution), she asked him to approach Ali who had narrated the Hadith.

Though the principles of judging a particular Hadith had not been formulated till then, she had adopted some basis for evaluating the narrations of her contemporaries and they appear to be the following:-

(1) The Hadith should not go against any verse of the Qur'an:-

(a) Abdullah bin Abbas and Abdullah bin Umar had narrated that the Prophet had said that when the inmates of the house bewail the death of any member of the family, the deceased is chastised. Ayesha refused to accept it. She said that the fact was that the Prophet happened to pass by the bier of a Jew whose relatives were lamenting his death. The Prophet observed "These people are crying while the dead person is being chastised." Chastisement has nothing to do with the mourning. The two are separate acts. As an authority, Ayesha cited the Qur'an, "No person would bear the burden of the sins of another." Among the doctors of Islamic Jurisprudence, Imam Shafii, Imam Muhammad and Imam Abu Hanifa follows Ayesha.

(b) A number of infidels had been killed in the battle of Badr. The Prophet said at their burial ground, "Have ye, too truly secured what your Lord hath promised you?" (Q. 7:44). Some of the Companions said to the Prophet, 'Are you addressing the dead?' Ibn Umar says that the Prophet had replied that 'they hear better than you but cannot answer.' When Ayesha learnt about it she said that the Prophet had not said this but had actually stated, "now they know for certain that I was telling them was true." 'O Prophet! Surely thou can't make those dead pay heed.' (Q. 27:80). 'And thou cannot make those who are dead hear.' (Q. 35:22).

Some people told Ayesha that Abu Huraira relates that the Prophet had said 'Inauspiciousness lies in three things – in women, in horses, in houses.' Ayesha said that this was not correct and Abu Huraira had heard only a part of the statement. The real statement was "The Jews say that inauspiciousness lies in three things – in women, in horses and in houses."[1]

Ibn Abbas relates that the Prophet had seen God twice. Masrooq Tabaii enquired about it from Ayesha. She replied, "You have said something which makes my hair stand on end. Whoever has said this, has lied," Then she recited the verse "No vision can take Him in and He takes in all visions and He is the Subtle, the All-informed" (Q. 6:104) and the verse, "nobody can possibly speak to Him except through inspiration or from behind the veil." Muslim records that the Prophet had said, "God is Light. How can I see Him?"

Muta

A temporary marriage for a specified period was customary in the days of ignorance and continued till 7 A.H. when it was abolished. Ibn Abbas and some others thought that it had not been totally banned while others thought it had

1. Abu Daud: Sunnan.

been prohibited. When someone enquired from Ayesha, she did not quote any Hadith but recited the Qur'anic verse, "And who keep their carnal impulse under restraint except with their wives or any of those whom their right hands possess."[1] In no other state it is permissible. A woman engaged in Muta is neither a wife nor a slave.[2]

Abu Huraira had given the opinion that an illegitimate issue was the worst of the three viz. himself, his father and mother. Ayesha said that it was not true. The fact is that a person was a hypocrite and used to speak ill of the Prophet. Somebody said that he was a bastard. The Prophet said that he was worse than his parents. This was about a specific case and not a general proposition. Ayesha recited the verse, 'Nobody would bear the burden of another.' The fault was of the parents and not of the child.[3]

Reflection

Some differences in the narration of Hadith by the companinons are due to their varying degrees of grasp and understanding. Since Ayesha was highly intelligent, the science of Hadith was greatly benefitted by her.

On the basis of narration by Abu Huraira, a story is related that a woman had tied up her cat and did not feed it until it died of hunger and thirst. Then she was chastised for it. When Abu Huraira met Ayesha she said, "Are you the person who has related this story." "He replied that he had heard it from the Holy Prophet." Ayesha said, "A believer in the sight of God is on too high a pedestal to be punished for a cat. Besides committing this sin, the woman was an infidel. Abu Huraira, when you relate something from the Prophet, ponder over what you are saying."

When Abu Saeed Khudri was on his death bed he wore new clothes saying that a Muslim is raised in the clothes he was wearing at the time of his death. When Ayesha heard it,

1. Q. 123:5, 6.
2. Seoti Asaba, quoting Hakim.
3. Seoti: Asaba citing Hakim.

she said, 'May God have mercy on Abu Saeed. What the Prophet had meant by apparel was man's deeds. He had clearly said that 'On the day of Judgement, people will be raised naked without any clothing."

According to Shariah, a widowed woman has to live for four months and ten days in the house of her deceased husband. A companion by the name of Fatima used to relate that she had been permitted to leave the house before the end of this waiting period. She narrated it as an authority before several companions. Some accepted it and some rejected it. During the governorship of Marwan a similar case arose in Medina and the woman cited the case of Fatima. When Ayesha came to know about it, she severely criticised Fatima saying that she had done no good in publicising her case. The Prophet had no doubt given her permission but it was a special case as the house of her deceased husband was insecure and situated at an isolated place.[1]

Abu Huraira had related that the Prophet had said, 'Even if I get a lash in the way of God, I would prefer it than freeing a bastard slave.' When Ayesha heard it, she said, "My God have mercy on Abu Huraira. He neither heard the Tradition properly nor has related it properly. When the verse was revealed, "But he doth not attempt the steep path. And what will make thee comprehend what the steep path is? It is to free the slave (from bondage)" (Q. 90:11 to 13). Somebody said 'We poor people do not have any slaves, male or female. Some have Negresses for doing household work. Should they be allowed to have illegitimate sons who can be freed?' The Prophet then said, 'Even if I get a lash in the way of God, I would prefer it then permitting this evil thing: to get an issue for being freed'."

Umar and several Companions said that prayers (Salat) should not be observed after the morning and afternoon prescribed prayers. Ayesha said, 'May God have mercy on Umar. He misunderstood things. The Prophet had said that

1. Bukhari & Muslim: Sahih, the book of divorce.

one should not do the Salat at the time of sunset and sunrise."[1] Theologians have explained that these are the timings of worshipping of the sun by some people and, therefore, they should be avoided. Viewed in this light the version of Ayesha is more correct and creditable for she has grasped the real significance. Umar had also understood the real significance but as a precaution he widened the time i.e. after the prescribed morning and afternoon (Asr) prayers so that there may be no possibility of saying prayers at the times of sunrise and sunset.

Abu Huraira had said that whosoever does not say the Witr prayers, it is as if he had said no prayers. Ayesha commented that they had all heard the Prophet saying, 'Whoso observes the five daily prayers after ablution and performs the kneeling and prostration well without any deficiency, has taken a guarantee from God that he would not be punished; whosoever does not enter into this covenant, it is up to God to forgive him or to punish him.' His deliverance is thus not certain. Neglect of obligatory duties will entail punishment but not of what are Sunnah. Witr is only Sunnah.

Personal knowledge

There are many matters in which the Companions gave their opinions on the basis of their interpretation or deduction and Ayesha rejected them on the basis of her own observation:-

(a) Ibn Umar gave a verdict that in taking a bath a woman should open the plaits of the hair of the head and wash them thoroughly. When Ayesha heard of it she observed 'why does not Ibn Umar say that women should shave off their head. I used to bathe before the Prophet and often I did not open the plaits of my hair and poured water over them.'

1. Bukhari: Sahih. Time of prayers.

(b) Ibn Umar used to say that kissing nullifies ablution. Ayesha said that the Prophet did not perform ablutions again after kissing.

(c) She heard that Abu Huraira had said that if a donkey, dog or woman crosses in front of the man saying prayers, the prayers are nullified. Ayesha got angry and said, 'You have equated us women with donkeys and dogs.' I used to lie before Prophet while he was praying (as there wasn't much space in the room) and he would push me with his hand when he was to do the prostration and I would pull up my legs and would spread them again when he stood up. Sometimes I would go across the prayer mat.'

(d) Abu Darda said in one of his sermons that if the sun has risen and one has not said the Witr prayers, it should not be said thereafter. Ayesha said that this is not correct. She had seen the Prophet saying Witr prayers after sunrise.

(e) Some people said that the Prophet had been enshrouded in a sheet brought from Yemen. Ayesha said that only this much was correct: that a sheet of Yemen had been brought, but it was not used.

(f) Abu Huraira said in his sermon that if during the days of fasting, bathing in the morning is necessary, he should not fast that day. People came to Ayesha and Umm Salma to seek confirmation. They said this was not pre-condition for keeping fast as demonstrated by the Prophet. Abu Huraira then withdrew his verdict.

(g) It was the general view that during the course of Hajj, everything became permissible after the stoning of the devils except going to one's wife or using scent. Ayesha said that there was no harm in using scent for she had herself scented the clothes of the Prophet.

(h) Ibn Abbas had given a verdict if one does not perform the Hajj but sends an animal for sacrifice, then all the prohibitions attached to Hajj would operate till the animal was sacrificed. Ayesha refuted this view and said that the

Prophet had himself sent animals for sacrifice but had not abandoned the permissible things which are used during the Hajj.

(i) Ibn Umar used to say that after having donned the Ihram in the morning, he would not like to use scent that night and would prefer to rub tarcoal. Ayesha was asked about it. She refuted this view and said that she remembered perfectly well that the Prophet had used scent the prceeding night.

Memory

A good memory is a necessary pre-requisite for narrating Hadith. Ayesha's memory was prodigious and many of her criticism of narrations of others is based on this:-

(1) When Sa'd bin Abi Waqas died, Ayesha wished that his bier should be brought to the mosque so that she could participate in the funeral prayers. Some people objected to it. She said how quickly people forget that the Prophet had said the funeral prayers of Suhail bin Baidha inside the mosque.

(2) Abdullah bin Umar was asked how many times the Prophet had done Umra. He answered that the Prophet had performed it four times and one was in the month of Rajab. Urwa called on Prophet to tell her this. She said from behind the curtain, "God have mercy on Abu Abdul Rehman (Kunniyat of Ibn Umar). I had accompanied the Prophet in all his **Umras** and none was performed during Rajab."[1]

(3) Ibn Umar told people that the days in a month are twenty-nine. This was mentioned to Ayesha who said that the Prophet had said that sometimes a month lasts twenty-nine days.

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1. Bukhari: Sahih, The Book of Umra.

Compilation of Ahadith narrated by Ayesha

Compilation of Ahadith narrated by the Companions was started by the middle of the first century Hijri. When Umar bin Abdul Aziz became Caliph in 101 A.H., Abu Bakr bin Umar bin Hazmul Ansari was the Qadi of Medina. He owed his learning and excellence to a large measure to his aunt Umyat who had been trained and educated by Ayesha. Umar bin Abdul Aziz sent a royal order to Qadi Abu Bakr to collect all the Ahadith narrated by Ayesha and send them for compilation to him.

Jurisprudence and Theology

From the academic point of view the Book and the Sunnah are the Foundation of the Faith and Jurisprudence and theology are the deductions.

In the time of the Prophet he was himself the source of knowledge and gave verdicts. In the time of Abu Bakr and Umar if any new matter or problem arose they would collect the learned Companions for consultation and if any one knew a Hadith relevant to the point he would cite it, otherwise judgement was given on the basis of analogy. This consulting body operated till the first half of Uthman's reign. When sedition broke out many people migrated to Makkah, Taif, Damascus and Basra. Ali made Kufa his capital. Many of the learned men had also migrated. While it helped the expansion of Knowledge, the stature of the collective body was lost. After the leading Companions had gone, Ibn Umar, Abdullah bin Abbas, Abu Huraira and Ayesha were the chief successors. In deciding matters about which positive orders were not available, they had different approaches. Abdullah bin Umar and Abu Huraira would keep silence if no pertinent verse of the Qur'an or Hadith decree of the preceding caliphs was known to them. Abdullah bin Abbas would give findings on the basis of analogy. Ayesha would try to find authority from the Qur'an, then refer to Hadith if the Qur'an was silent on the point and then resort to intellectual reasoning, if no light was shed by the Qur'an or Hadith on the point.

A person asked her if it was permissible to eat the flesh of slaughtered by people of Ajam on festival days. She said that the animals slaughtered for these occasions were not lawful. She recited the verse "He hath forbidden blood, and swine flesh and also that over which any name other than that of God had been invoked" (Q. 2:173).

Zayd bin Arqam purchased a slave girl from some woman for 800 Dirhams and the money was to be paid on receipt of his allowance. In the meantime he sold her back to the same woman for 600 Dirhams. The woman sought the opinion of Ayesha. She said, "what you have done is improper and the act of Zayd was also improper." She told him that the merit you had earned in Jehad had been lost unless you expressed repentence. She regarded the excess 200 as interest.

The Qur'an directs a divorced woman to wait for three "Qurou" before re-marriage. There was difference of opinion about the exact meaning of the word "Qurou". A niece of Ayesha had been divorced by her husband. When she had three menses, Áyesha called her away. When questioned, she explained that "Qurou" meant purity after menses. All the theologians of Medina followed her.

A point arisen if a husband gives authority to his wife to give divorce and the woman returns the authority and accepts her husband, would it be considered to be divorce? According to Ali and Zayd, it would, but Ayesha said there was no divorce and she cited as authority an option given by the Prophet to his wives to face austerity or to leave him for finding comforts else where, and this option was not treated as divorce.

When a person frees his slave, then a relationship of guardianship emerges between the master and the slave and they can have a share in inheritance. A slave came to her and said that his master Utba bin Ali Ka'ab and his wife had sold him on the condition that he would remain under their guardianship. Who was his master now? Ayesha cited a parallel case of Barira who had been purchased and freed by her under the direction of the Prophet who had said that guardianship would remain with her no matter what conditions were imposed by the sellers.

Barira was slave woman. Her mistress wanted to sell her on the condition that their guardianship would continue which was not acceptable to Ayesha. She consulted the Prophet who advised that she could purchase the girl and free her. All illegal restrictions will go. After she became free, she did not accept the husband she was married to during her slavery. She would accept alms and the Prophet would accept food procured out of those alms when she offered them to him as gift. On this case, three orders of Islam are based:

(i) The right of guardianship would go to the person freeing a slave;

(ii) If a male slave and a female slave are married and the wife becomes free she has a right to remain with or leave her husband;

(iii) If a deserving person receives alms and he presents it to a non-deserving person, it is permissible for the later to accept it for the nature of alms would change.

From the incident related by Ayesha during the course of her circumbulation of the Ka'ba during Hajj, Hafiz ibn Qaiyyim has laid down the following rules:-

(1) If a person intends to do Hajj as well as Umra, one set of circumbulation and going round Safa and Marwa are sufficient for both.

(2) If any round remains unfulfilled and a woman's period starts, she is absolved from completing the rounds.

(3) Intention to do Umra after Hajj is permissible to a woman thus disabled.

(4) A woman having menses can complete all the rites of Hajj except the circumbulation.

(5)Umra can be done twice in a month.

(6) If a person has intended separately to do Hajj and Umra and he fears that he may get late for Hajj he can do the Umra immediately after the Hajj.[1]

1. Hafiz Ibn Qaiyyim: Zad-ul-Maad Vol. 1. p. 201.

(7) Tan'yim, a place 2½ miles north west of Makkah, is outside the limits of Haram wherefrom Ayesha had put on a new Ihram doing circumbulation.

(8) Justification for doing Umra by Makkans is found from this Umra of Ayesha.

Reasoning (Qiyas)

Reasoning is not conjecture nor does it mean that anybody is allowed to give a verdict in matters of Shariah. It means that those learned men who have profound knowledge of Shariah and religious doctrines, can give considered opinions if no direct answer is available in the Qur'an or Sunnah in relation to any matter brought up before them.

In the time of the Prophet women were allowed to come to mosque to participate in congregational prayers. In later times when the financial condition of the Muslims had greatly improved, women started putting on fineries after having come into contact with women of other races. Ayesha said that if the Prophet had been alive, he would have forbidden women from attending the mosques.

Abu Huraira had given a finding that the man who bathes a dead body should take a bath afterwards and the bearers of the bier should do ablution afresh. Ayesha observed, 'Is a dead Muslim impure and what if a person lifts a piece of wood'?

Classification of Sunnah

In jurisprudence, distinction is made between the acts of the Prophet which were religious in character and those which were purely personal or were done in the exigenecies of particular situations. All his acts and practices are called Sunnah which is divided into religious, which were done to acquire merit as a part of religion, and habitual or personal if done in particular situations. The religious are again divided into **Mawakkada** or those done regularly and **Mastahaba** which were not done regularly. It is not incumbent on the

community to follow the habitual (Aadi) practices though those seeking greater nearness make it a point to follow them as well. Among the Companions Ibn Umar did not believe in this distinction and followed each and every practice of the Prophet irrespective of its character but Ayesha and Ibn Abbas upheld this distinction and therefore in a large number of small points there is divergence of opinion between the two groups.

Beliefs

Islam is a simple religion and its beliefs are also simple and straight forward. Contact with people of other religions and intellectual discussions had led to debates in later period of the Companions. The Mu'tazillites took a leading role in it. Some of the discussions related to abstruse points like the following:

1. Whether God possesses limbs, ear and eyes etc.

In the Qur'an as also in Hadith there are references to God's hands, feet, eyes, ears etc. The discussion was whether they should be taken in the literal and physical sense or by hand is meant authority, by eyes is meant sight or knowledge etc. It is not known what the Companions thought about it but their successors thought that they represent the various attributes of God and one should not indulge in futile conjectures when there is specific verse of the Qur'an that no human mind can fully comprehend Him. Ayesha was of this view. She said, "Praise to God who hears every sound."

2. Vision of God

The **Mu'tazillites** thought that God cannot be seen with physical eyes either in this world or in the Hereafter. They cited the verses of the Qur'an in **Surah**, "The Cattle" and "The Counsel" reproduced earlier but the bulk of the Muslims were of the view that although vision of God in this world is not possible but it is not only a possibility but would actually happen in the Hereafter. The **Mu'tazillites** derived support

from the view of Ayesha that the Prophet had not seen God in his ascension but Ibn Abbas differed from her and relied on the verse, "For, indeed he beheld Him yet again, near the Lote Treet lying farthest........ His sight did not blink nor did it miss anything. Indeed he beheld clearly the greatest signs of his Lord."[1] Ayesha was of the view that the Prophet had seen Gabriel and not God. However, her view relates only to the Acension and not to vision of God in the Hereafter.

Knowledge of the Unseen

No one besides God knows the Unseen. God alone is Omniscient, knower of the visible and the invisible. "No one except God knoweth the secrets of the heavens and the earth." (Q. 27:65). Some people were inclined to believe that one of the qualities of a prophet is to know the unseen. Ayesha vehemently opposed this notion and referred to the verse, 'No one knows that will happen to him tomorrow.' Even a prophet does not know it. How can he be then, knower of the unseen? It is, however, true that God, in His Infinite Wisdom gives knowledge to His prophets of some secrets or future events.

Concealment of revelations

No body can think that a prophet can conceal any part of the revelation descending on him. The Qur'an exorted the Prophet, 'O Prophet! Preach what hath been delivered to thee from thy Lord, for, if thou do it not, then hou hast failed to fulfill the function of a Messenger!'[2]

No one likes to broadcast even his smallest failings. There are many verses in the Qur'an which rebuked the Prophet for one thing or the other but the Prophet narrated them verbatim. There is a verse of the Qur'an, 'And call to mind the occasion when thou saidst to him (Zaid), on whom God had conferred a favour and on whom thou also hadst conferred a

1. Q. 53: 13, 17, 18.
2. Q. 5: 67.

favour (by adopting him), "keep thy wife to thyself and fear God," and thou kept to thyself what God intended to bring to light and this thou didst to avoid criticism from men. Better it would have been for thee to fear God.[1] Ayesha said that if the Prophet wanted to conceal anything, he would have concealed this verse.

Ahle-Sunnah believe that all the Companions were just, reliable and righteous persons unless something wrong is definitely proved against any of them. After the assassination of Uthman and the conflict between Ali and Muawiyah the people of Egypt, Iraq and Syria began to criticise and slander the Companions in a partisan spirit. Ayesha considered it derogatory to the command of God who has said, "Our Lord! Forgive us, and our brethren who have preceded us in the faith, and make not our hearts il-disposed towards those who have already believed. O Lord, Verily, thou art Kind, Merciful."[2] Ayesha said, "O nephew, God has ordered us to pray for the Companions of the Prophet and these people abuse tlthem."[3]

Succession to Prophet

Muslim records that Ayesha had narrated that the Prophet had asked her on his death bed, "Call your father Abu Bakr and your brother. I fear that some person aspiring (for Caliphate) may not say that he is the most deserving, though God and the believers want Abu Bakr to hold this office."

Punishment in grave

The Qur'an has not explicitly referred to chastisement in the grave though it makes mention of punishment after death and before ressurection (i.e. in the realm of **Barzakh**). **Mu'tazilla** still do not accept it. Two Jewesses visited Ayesha and during the course of conversation one of them said, 'God

1. Q. 33: 37.
2. Q. 59: 10.
3. Muslim: Sahih Kitab us Tafsir.

may save you from the chastisement of the grave.' This was new to Ayesha and she consulted the Prophet who said, "It is true." When Ayesha gave greater attention to his prayers, she noticed that his prayers, inter alia, sought refuge from the punishment of the grave.

Knowledge of the inner meanings of religious precepts

There is no doubt that all the commandments of the **Shariah** are based on wisdom but it is not necessary that all the secrets be known to men. God, in His Infinite Mercy and Benevolence, has revealed the meaning in the Qur'an in many matters and, likewise, the Prophet explained the prudence behind many of his orders. Those among the Companions who were closest to him knew the esoteric meanings and purpose of the orders. Shah Waliullah Dehlavi in his splendid book **Hujjatula-al-Baligha** has answered the objection that when our revered ancestors did not care to compile and codify the inner meanings, why should we do it? The answer is that if the ancestors did not compile it, it does not argue against our effort, particularly when the Prophet himself had indicated the principles and the derivations and the theologians amongst the companions like Umar, Ali, Zaid bin Thabit, Ibn Abbas and Ayesha had followed him and had made investigations and elaborations. Ayesha heads the list amongst those who disclosed them and this is borne out by the books of Hadith.

Choronoligical order of the Qur'an

From the point of view of the place of descent of the revelations the Qur'an can be divided into two parts – one is Makkah and the other is of Medina. The revelations pertaining

to them are different in meaning and composition. The Makkan verses are soul-stirring, appeal to the emotions, and are replete with grandeur and majesty; their words are eloquent and sentences rhythmical, they deal with beliefs, guidance and good counsels Unity of God, the Day of Resurrection and Judgement. They are forthright and demand worship and righteousness, contain invitation and preachings and contain no arguments against Jews and Christians and make no reference to **Jihad**. The Medinian verses are succinct, profound and deep, contain law and commandments in legal language, are not so rhythmical. They exhort men to worship and good deeds, refute the theories and objections of Jews and Christians, and provide for **Jihad** besides preachings and invitation. The Orientalists take pride in discovering these differences but 1335 years ago Ayesha had noticed the differences in purpose and phraseology. Bukhari records that she had stated, "The first Surah that was revealed is explicit making references to Heaven and Hell. When people started accepting Islam, the lawful and the unlawful were differentiated. Had the people been asked in the very begining to give up drinking, they would not have yielded, had they been asked to abstain from adultery and fornication, they would not have listened. The requital of all deeds will be on the Day of Judgement, which will be very terrible."

What she intended to say was that slowly and gradually the preachings were extended to cover larger and larger fields. Islam first came to ignorant people. In an eloquent, stirring and effective manner people were told about Heaven and Hell and cautioned to behave. When their souls had been stirred, the commandments, prohibitions and laws were revealed gradually. The language, style and delivery were in keeping with the object and purpose. The language of a book of sermons and good counsels cannot be the same as that of a penal code. Ayesha says that the Surahs Cow and Women were revealed in Medina in the presence of Jews and Christians so, their theories and views had to be refuted. The Surah "Moon" was revealed in Makkah. Its sentences are short and eloquent with a view to stir the souls of the people.

Reasons for success of Islam in Medina

The success of any movement is a historical phenomenon and it is generally assumed that before the 20th century, the world had not reached that stage of development when such questions could be even raised. When authors and scholars find answers to such questions, they consider it as a great achievement. But nothing was hidden before that Eye which was causing and beholding the events The success of Islam in the face of bitter and vehement opposition was nothing short of miracle but it is not necessary that a miracle should take place in the absence of causes The collection of different causes at the appropriate time is also a miracle of God. It is not available for every worldly movement, otherwise no movement shall ever fail.

Before the advent of Islam, people of Medina were engaged in internecine warfare. In the tribal feuds many leaders who very often opposed every movement of reform lost their lives. The Ansars had so exhausted themselves that when Islam came, they considered it a blessing and raised no obstacles. The way for success of Islam in Medina had been made smooth by God Ayesha says that the battle of **Bauth** was an event arranged by God before calling His Apostle to his mission When he came to Medina, the solidarity of its people had been shattered and their leaders had been slain. God had facilitated aforehand the entry of its people in the fold of Islam.[1]

Shortening of prayers in journeys

The prescribed prayers of four **Rakah** are reduced to two **Rakah** during journeys. Apparently it seems to be a concession but the real reason has been disclosed by Ayesha. She says, "In Makkah all the prescribed prayers were of two **Rakahs**. When the Prophet migrated to Medina, three of the prescribed prayers became four **Rakahs** while the prayers on journeys were left at two.

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1. **Bukhari: Sahih. Chapter: Alqasama fil Jahilya.**

Why two Rakahs in the morning prayers

Obviously there is more repose in the morning and the prayers could be easily of more than two **Rakahs.** Ayesha furnished the clue 'for the morning prayers, there was no addition for therein longer Surahs are recited.' The **Shariah** has contemplated greater absorption and devotion in the morning prayers. The emphasis is on quality and elation rather on numbers.

Fast on the tenth day of Muharram

Even in the days of ignorance, the tenth of Muharram was observed as a fasting day. When the Ramadhan prayers were prescribed, fast on the day of Ashura no longer remained obligatory. No body except Ayesha has disclosed why fasting was done on the tenth of Muharram. She says that this was done as the cover of Ka'ba was changed on that day.

Why the Prophet did not say Tarawih prayers throughout Ramadhan

Ibn Abbas says that no one knew better than Ayesha what prayers the Prophet said during the night.[1] She said that the Prophet did not say more than thirteen **Rakahs** in the night whether it was Ramadhan or otherwise. One day he said **Tarawih** prayers during Ramadhan in the night in the mosque. Some people joined him. The next day more people assembled for this prayer. The number increased further on the third day an on the fourth day the number increased so much that there was no space in the mosque. The following day the Prophet did not go to the mosque and the people returned disappointed. The Prophet explained in the morning. "I knew your feelings in the night but I feared that **Tarawih** may become compulsory for you and you may fail later on to observe it." After the death of the Prophet when there was no possibility of its becoming obligatory, the Companions took

1. Ahmad: Musnad VI. VI, p. 244.

care to say it regularly. Those who take the Hadith literally consider it **Mustahab** (praiseworthy) but those who follow the companions consider it as Sunnah **Mowakkada**.

The Reality of Hajj

The ignorant comment that the rites of Hajj like circumbulation of the Ka'ba, running between some points, staying at certain places and throwing of stones appear to be meaningless. Ayesha says that these rites are calculated to promote remembrance of God. They are not the object of themselves but are places of rememberance of God. The Qur'an alludes that in the time of Abraham, it was a mode of worship and **Hajj**, which is in memory of Abraham, has retained that mode of worship which every person having the means to perform must do once in his life time. Those who participate in the Hajj actually realise the fervour, the exaltation, the ecstacy and the devotion generated by these rites.[1]

Stay in the valley of Mahsab during Hajj

The Prophet had stayed in this valley during the pilgrimage and so did the companions after him. Ibn Umar considered it as a part of traditional rites but his view was not shared by Ayesha who said, "The Prophet stayed here only for convenience." Ibn Abbas and Abu Rafay agreed with Ayesha.

Construction of the Ka'ba

Outside the Ka'ba but adjacent to it is a small space enclosed by short walls called "Hateem". Pilgrims go around the Hateem during Tawaf. Some Companions raised the question that if it is not part of the Ka'ba, why do pilgrims go around the Hateem? No one except Ayesha gave the reason. She says she had enquired from the Prophet who had said that Hateem was part of Ka'ba. She put the next query. "Why

1. Translator's note.

did not the people include it at the time of construction of Ka'ba?" The Prophet replied that the people had not the means to do it. She further enquired "Why has the door of Ka'ba been kept at such a height?" The Prophet replied that the door is to control entry inside it.

The next question arose "Why had not the Prophet himself included the portion inside the Ka'ba?" The Prophet replied, 'O Ayesha, if your people were not so near the days of indifelity, I would have demolished the building and raised it a new on the foundations laid by Ibrahim.' The People had recently accepted Islam and the fear was that demolition might excite them. The inference is that if there is delay in the execution of any work of Shariah on the dictates of the situation, it is not a matter of reproach provided the Shariah does not require its immediate compliance.

Ibn Zubair, nephew of Ayesha, during the course of his caliphate had demolished the building and had it reconstructed on the original foundations but when Abdul Malik reigned after the assassination of Ibn Zubair, he demolished the building again and had it reconstructed on the previous foundation as he thought that Ibn Zubair had acted on his own volition.

Hijra

Hijra does not mean merely shifting from one's ancestral place to Medina and Makkah though one is living comfortably in his place in all security. Ata bin Rabat, a leading Tabaii had wanted to know from Ayesha its real significance and she had said, "Now there is no Hijra. It took place when people came running to God and His Apostle in the fear that they might be persecuted to force them away from their new faith. Now God has given supremacy to Islam and Muslims can fearlessly worship their God anywhere although the merit of **Jihad** and good intentions remains."[1] This explains why Ibn Umar used to say that there was no Hijra after the fall of Makkah as peace

1. Bukhari: Sahih, Chapter Hijra.

and security was prevailing. If a person however leaves his birth place to settle down in Makkah for nearness to God or His Apostle he will earn merit for his intention.

The burial of the Prophet inside his apartment

When the Prophet died, there was a difference of opinion among the Companions as to where he should be buried. It is related that Abu Bakr had said that prophets are buried at the place they die. Perhaps Abu Bakr had said so but as it is a historical question, it requires proof. Ayesha states, "At the time of his death the Prophet had said that God may cursed Jews and Christians who make the tombs of their prophets places of worship. Had it not been so the Prophet might have been buried in the open but the danger was that his tomb be converted into a place of worship."[1]

This explains why it is still necessary to retain the walls and the roofs of the apartment where the Prophet is buried.

1. Ahmad: Musnad, Vol. VI, p. 121.

The burial of the People's [illegible]

[illegible]

Medicine, History, Literature, Rhetoric & Poetry

Pupils of Ayesha state that she had considerable proficiency in history, literature, rhetoric and poetry besides some knowledge of medicine. Hisham bin Urwa says he had not found any one excelling Ayesha in knowledge of Qur'an, obligatory duties, the lawful and the unlawful, poetry, the history of the Arabs and geñeology.

In medicine her knowledge was limited to what the older women in days gone by knew about indigenous medicines to cure ailments. She had gained this knowledge from the physicians visiting the Prophet.

History and geneology she had learnt from her father, Abu Bakr, who was regarded as an authority in geneology. Many of the customs prevailing in the days of ignorance and the condition of society of that time we learn only from the narrations made by Ayesha, like different ways of marriage, the system of divorce, the songs sung at the time of marriages, the days on which fasts were held, the rites of **Hajj** etc. The Ahadith narrated by others are generally of few sentences but many of those narrated by Ayesha cover several pages for she has described the background and context as well and the cause and necessity thereof. She has given detailed description of the battles of Badr, Uhad and the Trenches and some details of the expedition of Bani Quraiza, the prayers at moments of fear and insecurity in the expedition of Dhat-ur-Ruqa, the pledge of women at the Fall of Makkah, the necessary details of Farewell Pilgrimage. Many of the details of the life of the Holy Prophet have been furnished by her such as the manner of descent of the Qur'an, the details of

Hijra, the Prophet's death, his daily prayers, his household engagements, his personal habits and deportment and the hardest day of his life. She also described the succession of Abu Bakr, the demands of the views of the Prophet and his daughter Fatima, the grievance of Ali and the pledging of fealty.

Literature

By literature we mean elegance of composition and dialogue. One of her pupils Musa bin Tulha said that he had not come across any one more eloquent than Ayesha and his view is shared by Ahnaf bin Qais Tabaii who stated that he had not seen any one excelling Ayesha in elegance of expression, depth of thought, or fluency and grace in language.[1]

Oratory and Rhetoric

Eloquence and oratory was a natural talent of the Arabs and it was not confined to men. Many women were equally brilliant orators and their speeches have been preserved and compiled by Ahman bin Abi Tahir in his book, **Balaghat-un-Nisa**. It includes speeches of Ayesha. Tabari has reproduced her speeches made in the field of the Battle of Camel.

Ahraf bin Qais says that he had heard the speeches of all the Caliphs but the excellence and the evelation he noticed in the speeches of Ayesha surpassed others. Amir Muawiyah said that he had not met any orator more eloquent, more fluent and sharp-witted than Ayesha.[2] She could raise and modulate her voice to make it grand and commanding.

Poetry

Before the advent of Islam, poetry was the only literary asset of the Arabs. Among them were many great poets including both men and women who could, when the

1. Hakim: Mustadarak, Tirmidhi: Munaqib.
2. Zarqani: Muhabib Vol. 3, page 267.

occasion demanded, incite and influence the people or invigorate and inspire them. Before and after the advent of Islam the Arabs retained their particular skill and there were unrivalled poetesses whose verses still adorn Arabic literature. Abu Bakr was a great connoisseur of poetry and Ayesha inherited this art from him. She remembered by heart the long ode of K'ab bin Malik and a large number of poems by others.

When the pagans of Makkah composed poems derogatory to the dignity of the Prophet, we learn on the authority of Ayesha, that he desired the poets of Islam to pay back the pagans in the same coin as it would injure them more than arrows. K'ab bin Malik wrote some couplets but the most piercing poems were written by Hassan bin Thabit. The Prophet remarked, "Hassan! As long you continue to defend God and His Apostle, Gabriel will assist you." He also said, "By giving a fitting reply, Hassan has alleviated my grief."

Poetry is in itself neither good nor evil. What makes it good or bad is its context. If its substance does not go against piety, refinement and good behaviour there is nothing wrong with it. If it infringes decency and good behaviour, it is just as sinful as profane, indecent and unbecoming prose. Some people have quoted unauthentic Hadith to suggest that the Prophet had condemned poetry but this is contrary to facts. He used to recite poetry himself. Ayesha says, "Some poetry is good and some is bad. Choose the good ones and discard the rest." Abdullah bin Umar narrates a Hadith of similar import that poetry is manner of expression. Good verses are like good speech and bad verses are like foul talk.

Education and Instruction

A service of learning is to impart it to others. The Prophet had said, "Let those who are present, convey the instructions to those who are not present." After the death of the Prophet, the Companions had spread out to all parts of the country for conveying the message of Islam and to spread learning and knowledge everywhere. They had stationed themselves in all central places. After twenty-seven years, the capital of the

State had shifted first to Kufa then to Damascus but Medina retained its spiritual dignity and continues to serve as the centre of learning. The abodes of Ibn Umar, Abu Huraira, Ibn Abbas, Zaid bin Thabit served as focal points of learning but the highest centre was the residence of Ayesha. Women, children and those men from whom she did not observe Purdah used to sit inside, while other men would sit in the courtyard of the Prophet's mosque to hear her. People used to ask questions or some topic would be taken for discussion or she herself would raise some point and then give a lecture. She would see that her pupils' accent and pronounciations were correct. Besides them there were regular pupils from many families particularly orphans whom she had taken in her care for upbringing.

At the time of annual pilgrimage her tent used to be pitched betweeen mount Hira and Thabir. People of various nationalities would hasten in large number to hear her sermons and lectures and would seek clarifications and explanations. She would encourage people to ask questions.

Her pupils used to revere her and to pay greatest attention to what she said. Ibn Hanbal has recorded in his Musnad about two hundred Hadiths narrated by the pupils of Ayesha among whom are both men and women, companions, **Tabaii**, free men and slaves, relations and others. Among her most outstanding pupils were Urwa son of Zubair, a doyen of his days and a teacher of Imam Zuhri; Qasim grandson of Abu Bakr, a leading Mufti of Medina; Abu Salam son of Abdul Rahman bin Auf who ranked alongwith Urwa and Masrooq Kufi, an adopted son of Ayesha who was a leading jurist and Qadi of Iraq. Among the ladies the most outstanding was Umra bint Abdul Rahman. She was brought up and loved by Ayesha and was a high ranking reporter of Hadith. According to Imam Bukhari she was the secretary of Ayesha and people used to send gifts and letters to Ayesha through her. The Caliph Umar bin Abdul Aziz had directed the Qadi of Medina to compile all the Ahadith narrated by her. A **Muhaddith** had advised Imam Zuhri to approach her. Imam Zuhri says that he found her an unfathomable ocean of knowledge[1]. Safia bint

1 Zabbi: Tazkirat, Vol. 1, page 99.

Shaiba, Kulthum bint Umrah-Quraishia, Ma'ada bint Abdullah were some other brilliant pupils who gained considerable fame in reporting Hadith.

Judgements

Enough has been said to show what predominance, authority and leadership Ayesha had gained in the forty years of her life after the death of the Prophet. There is also documentary proof on the basis of the number of her verdicts **(fatawa), Muhaddithin** have divided the learned Companions into three categories – those whose **fatawa**, if collected, would run into several volumes, those whose **fatawa** will from one treatise and those whose fatawa would combine to make a treatise. In the first category are included, Umar, Ali, Abdullah bin Masud, Zaid bin Thabit, Abdullah bin Abbas, Abdullah bin Umar and Ayesha.

Ayesha had occupied this position in the time of her father and she continued to occupy it till the end of the glorious Caliphate and beyond. Qasim, one of the seven eminent Tabaiins of Medina, attests that she used to give **Fatawa** during the reign of Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and till the end of her life.[1] Even Amir Muawiyah used to send messengers to her from Damascus to seek her views and advice. Tirmidhi records that Companions had said, "If any problems confronted us Companions, Ayesha had solutions for them." Ibn S'ad and Masruq Tabaii say "even leading Companions used to consult her."

As Medina was the heart of the Islamic world, thousands of people used to visit the city to pay homage to the Prophet's tomb and they would invariably go to Ayesha's residence in search of knowledge.

Instructions and Guidance

In any religion, renewal is essential when the voice of its founder becomes inaudible with passage of time but in his era, repetition of his message is needed to save it from

1. Ibn Saad: Tabeqat, Vol. II, p. 126

extinction. This repetition and preaching of the message is called **Irshad** meaning instructions or guidance. In spite of her veil, the effort of Ayesha in this direction was no less than that of other Companions.

In the reign of Uthman a network of intrigue had been spread which was damaging the very fabric of Islam. Due to the machinations of the people of Egypt and Iraq, some people had started abusing Uthman. Makhariq bin Shamama, a leading man of Basra, sought Ayesha's advice and she wrote back, "Those who curse Uthman are accursed of God. I had seen revelation descending on the Prophet while he was reclining against the person of Uthman; the Prophet gave in marriage two of his daughters, one after the other, to him; he was selected for recording of the Qur'an. God does not confer this nearness and dignity upon any one who is not honoured in His sight or that of His Apostle."[1]

Abu Salma son of Abdul Rahman bin Auf had a dispute with some people about a piece of land. Ayesha called him and advised him to give up the land as the Prophet had said, "If a person unjustifiably occupies even a span of land, seven cubits of earth beneath will be his halter." Ibn Abi Sanib Tabaii was a preacher of Medina who would avail himself of every opportunity to preach in order to show off his sanctity and verbose language in his prayers. Ayesha asked him to give three undertakings – (i) do not use verbose language in prayers for that was not the way of the Prophet or his Companions, (ii) preach once a week and not more than two or three days in a week so that people may not get bored and (iii) do not infiltrate in the gathering of people to cut short their talk and to start you sermon. Do it when they ask for it.

In countries outside Arabia, different names were used for wines and liquor. People made enquiries from Ayesha. She said wine is wine by whatever name it is called and even dry dates should not be soaked in utencils and cups of wines. She advised women not to put on sound producing anklets which can attract men or fine muslin Dopattas and used to ask them to remember the command of God in Surah "Light".

1. Ahmad: Musnad Vol. VI, p. 261.

She found two adolescent girls saying prayers inside their house without putting on sheets. She advised them to put on sheets in future. She would encourage people to take part in **Jihad** and would quote the Prophet's saying, "No Muslim receive dust in the way of God but God forbids the fire of Hell to touch him."

Somebody told her that some persons repeat the Qur'an so rapidly that they finish it two or three time in a night. She observed "Their reading amounted to no reading. Often times the Prophet prayed throughout the night but he would not go beyond the Surahs "Cow", the "Family of Imran" and "Women". If he came across any glad tiding he would pray for its bestowal and if he met any verse forboding punishment, he would seek refuge of God from it."

The covering of the Ka'ba is changed every year. In her days the **Mutawalli** of the Ka'ba used to bury the covering so that no filthy hand could touch it. She told the **Mutawalli** Shaiba, "This is not a good practice. After its removal from the Ka'ba, it would make no difference if any one puts on a garment made out of it in a state of impurity. Better sell its pieces and spend the proceeds on the poor and the way-farer." It is probably because of her advice that pieces of the covering began to be sold. Muslims throughout the world should be grateful to her that they can receive pieces of the covering as a blessing.

She saw some persons laughing while they were coming to meet her. She was told that one of them had got tangled with the rope of a tent and fell down ludicrously. She adomnished them saying, "If a thorn pierces a Muslim or if he is placed even in small difficulties, God raises his stature and forgives his sins."[1]

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1. Muslim: Sahih, Chapter Merit.

The debt of Gratitude our Women owe to Ayesha

The greatest favour that Ayesha has done to women is to demonstrate that a Muslim lady, living in **Purdah**, can actively participate in literacy, religious, social and political activities and by exhortation, counsel and guidance can work for the betterment of the community. Her life is a living example of the status conferred by Islam on women and how it raised them from indignity and inferiority. Among the Companions were men who could be justifiably designated Messiah of Islam or Haroon of the Prophet's era and by the same token Ayesha could be designated as the Maryam of Islam.

The women-folk of the companions used to reach the Prophet through Ayesha and she would put in a word for them. Uthman bin Maz'aun used to live like an ascetic. His wife approached Ayesha and informed her that her husband kept fast every day and spent the whole night in prayers. Ayesha mentioned it to the Prophet who called on Uthman and said to him, "Islam does not advocate monasticism. Could you not follow my pattern? I fear God much greater than you do and take care to fulfil His commands yet I fulfil the duty I owe to may wives."[1]

Hala used to spend whole nights in prayers. Ayesha mentioned this to the Prophet when she came to meet her. The Prophet advised her, "Do only as much as you can bear to do."[2]

A woman was punished for theft. She became penitent but even so women did not like to meet her. Ayesha would visit her and would even convey her requests to the Prophet.

1. Ahmad: Musnad, Vol. VI, p. 226.
2. Ahmad: Musnad, Vol. VI, p. 264

Ayesha used to get angry if any one considered women as low and inferior. In deciding juristic points concerning women, she used to keep their convenience in view and would cite the Qur'an and Hadith to support her opinion. Her views are followed in most of the Islamic countries. Ibn Zubair held the view that women should cut their hair upto four fingers breadth as a concluding rite of Hajj but Ayesha pronounced that it would be quite adequate for them to cut off a bit from any side.

Before Islam, women had no right in inheritance. Islam gave this right to them. Many of the details are mentioned in the Qur'an but occasions to arise when inferences have to be drawn from the Qur'an and Hadith. One such situation is the state where no son of the deceased is alive and only daughters, grand sons and grand daughters are living. Abdullah bin Masud held that in such a case the grand daughters would have no share but Ayesha held otherwise.

If a man has declared divorce once or twice, he has to bear the expenditure of his wife during the waiting period but if he had declared it three times, opinions differ as regards the responsibility to maintain the divorcee during the stipulated period that intervenes before re-marriage. Some thought that the only reason for her staying in her husband's house was the possibility that they may reconcile their differences and again enter into wed-lock, but this applied to cases where upto two declarations have been made. After the third declaration, the divorce is complete and they cannot remarry without an intervening marriage with another person. The main reason seems to be that it has to be ascertained, if the divorcee is pregnant, the responsibility to maintain the woman rests with the former husband. If anybody forces a person to divorce his wife on pain of imprisonment or death, according to Ayesha, the divorce is not valid. Except for Abu Hanifa, all other leading doctors of law have accepted her view. But for this, it would have been difficult for respectable women to escape the greed and tyranny of unscrupulous rulers.

In the days of ignorance, neither the number of divorces nor the period for return to wedlock were regulated. It was

not unusual for men to divorce their wives and take them back before the end of the period of return and to do it repeatedly for some ulterior gain. Such a case came up before Ayesha and she referred it to the Prophet whereupon the revelation came, "A return to each other is permissible upto two declarations of divorce; thereafter an honourable retention or a graceful parting." (Q. 2:229).

The Greatness of Ayesha

History had recorded for us the names of many outstanding women of different ages and countries. Among the famous non-muslim women, figure those who had incidentally performed some spectacular act to gain renown like delivery of brilliant speeches, setting at naught the conspiracy of their enemies or winning a battle through their stratagem and bravery. Some gained fame for their extraordinary beauty or occupation of a throne. Can all these performance stand any comparison to consistent, continuous, planned and life-long fruitful endeavour?

Leaving aside these general considerations if we were to see from the point of view of religion, piety and spirituality we will not find any other star in the firmament of the female world shedding a light remotely as resplendant. What other woman in the whole world, besides the mother of the believers, who alongwith righteousness, excellence of character and strict observance of religious obligations, performed splendid deeds in social, political, educational literary and religious fields leaving a valuable pattern for millions of women to follow by her own way of life, devotion to God, advocacy of spiritual ideals, exposition and elucidation of the tenets of religion and **Shariah** and laws and regulations governing them. Among the Muslim women the only ones who can be compared with her are the other wives and daughters of the Prophet. All the **Ulama** of Islam are unanimous that the greatest women in the Islamic world are the Khadija, Fatima and Ayesha. Some have ranked them, inter se, in this very order, which is a matter of personal opinion not based on any definite pronouncement of **Shariah**. Allama ibn Nazm has

gone to the length of saying that not only among women, not only among **Ahle-Bait** but even among the Companions she ranks the highest and he has given a long list of arguments in support of his view. We follow, however, Allama ibn Taimiya and his disciple Hafiz ibn Qaiyyim who have said that if by superiority is meant rank in the celestial world, God alone knows. But from the worldly point of view Ayesha's attainments are multidimentional. If nobility of the family is the criterion, Fatima occupies the highest place. If precedence in religion, encounter with initial difficulties and support, assistance and befriending of the Prophet in those difficult days are the criteria, then Khadija ranks the highest. But if attainments in knowledge service of religion, propagation of the sayings of the Prophet, guidance and education are the criteria of superiority, Ayesha stands unrivalled.[1]

We know about the greatness of Hadhrat Mariam through the Qur'an, though the Bible's tales give her special eminence. Pharoah's wife Hadhrat A'asiya has, likewise, been conferred distinction by Islam though the old Testament is silent on this point. We accept their greatness and superiority even though history is silent. But the holy tongue that expressed the revelations, has already made the declaration.

> "Among men there were many perfect persons but none among women except two: Mariam, daughter of Imran and A'asiya, wife of Pharoah. And Ayesha has superiority over other women as Tharid has over other dishes."

May God shower His blessings on her, the **Ahle-Bait**, the Companions and the Holy Prophet!

1. Zarqani: Muhahib, Vol. III, p. 269.